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## THE JOLLY DUCHESS







*The Duchess of St. Albans  
Harriot Mellon—Mrs. Coutts*

# THE JOLLY DUCHESS

HARRIOT MELLON, AFTERWARDS  
MRS. COUTTS AND THE DUCHESS OF ST. ALBANS

*A SIXTY YEARS' GOSSIPPING RECORD  
OF STAGE AND SOCIETY (1777 TO 1837)*

BY

CHARLES E. PEARCE

*Author of "The Amazing Duchess," "The Beloved Princess,"  
"Polly Peachum and 'The Beggar's Opera,'" etc.*

WITH A PHOTOGRAVURE FRONTISPICE AND FORTY-ONE  
ILLUSTRATIONS, INCLUDING SEVERAL FROM THE COLLEC-  
TION OF MR. A. M. BROADLEY

LONDON  
STANLEY PAUL & CO  
31 ESSEX STREET, STRAND, W.C.

*Published in 1915*

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To

MY FRIEND

EDGAR H. HOMAN

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## INTRODUCTION

IT may not perhaps escape the notice of some who peruse the following pages that in dealing with the aspect of social life during the sixty years which, roughly speaking, comprehended the career of the subject of these memoirs, no mention is made of the caricatures which formed so prominent a feature of the period. The omission is due to the fact that many of the caricatures of which Harriot Mellon, as Mrs. Coutts and the Duchess of St. Albans, was the subject did not come under my notice until the book was nearly ready for publication, and it was then too late to review them in detail.

Those caricatures which I have had an opportunity of seeing are eighteen in number, and eight of the most important will be found reproduced in the present volume. So far as my researches have gone no caricatures of Harriot Mellon, the actress, appear to exist. Probably before her marriage with Thomas Coutts she was not of sufficient importance to attract the attention of the caricaturist, and thus she was spared the indignities Mrs. Jordan suffered at the hands of Gilray. It is true that when her turn came to be pilloried pictorially she was treated with freedom and vulgarity, but not more so than might be expected from the times. The earliest caricature is dated November 1825, and is entitled “The New Banking Company’s Scales of Equity.” Mr. Coutts had then been dead three years and a half, and Mrs. Coutts simply as the banker’s widow passed unnoticed, but directly her name was associated with that of a member of the aristocracy she became a target to be aimed at, and this is apparent in the

cartoon in question, which represents a pair of scales with money bags at one end balancing a ducal coronet at the other. The second cartoon was published in February 1826, when the widow was scandalising society by taking the Duke of St. Albans under her wing wherever she went. Liston as Paul Pry was then the talk of the town, and the title “Paul Pry at Widow Cout’s” and the words put into his mouth are sufficiently explanatory. The meaning of “A Frolic at the Melon Shop in Piccadilly” (June 1826) is not very clear, and it is difficult to establish the identity of the elderly gentleman who is receiving castigation at the hands of Mrs. Coutts. In “A Visit to Court” (May 1826) the caricaturist’s intention is to show the influence of gold. The lady to the right of the picture is the Spanish danseuse, the wife of Ball Hughes, whose wealth and extravagance earned him the title of the “Golden” Ball. To the left is Mrs. Coutts.

The caricaturist’s favourite method of identifying his victim by portraying some peculiarity, real or fanciful, is shown in “A Sketch at St. Albans, or Shaving the New Maid Dutchess” (June 1827), where prominence is given to the lady’s growth of hair on the upper lip. This cartoon was published immediately after her marriage to the duke. A second cartoon, uncoloured and embodying a similar idea, but poor in design and execution, appeared about the same time. Three other cartoons appeared in June. These were: “The Morning after Marriage,” a not particularly decorous production; “A New Farce in High Life,” open to the same criticism; and “The Honeymoon and the Man in the Moon.” The two uncoloured cartoons of July, “One of the Graces” and “Feasting during Pleasure,” are unimportant.

The satirical pencils were idle for a year; then the Duchess furnished ample material for ridicule by the ludicrous festivities at Holly Lodge in celebration of the anniversary of her marriage. This called forth “A Scene in the Honeymoon,” which, as the repro-

duction shows, faithfully illustrated the text describing the festivities in question. Four other cartoons appeared in 1828: "A Dream of Retrospection"; "A View of the Grand Barge," a skit on the rotundity of Her Grace's person; "The Presentation of Dollalolla," in which the Duke of Devonshire, for whose friendship and countenance the Duchess had reason to be grateful, is seen in the background; and "Making Decent," where the sorry jest of the Duchess's moustache does duty once more. In "Lady Day at Court," published in April 1829, the Duchess figures among the corpulent society dames of the period, and in a coloured print dated May 29, entitled "Run, Neighbours, Run," she is represented dancing a quadrille with Sir George Warrender, a well-known patron of musicians. Sir George conceived the idea of giving scenes from Italian Operas at his house, and the Duchess, not to be outdone in the way of fashionable novelties, followed suit, as one may learn from the *Morning Post* of February 24, which records how she gave an operatic concert comprising the first act of "Don Juan" "by the same artists who so satisfactorily exerted themselves at Sir George Warrender's the night previous." After this the Duchess seems to have dropped out of sight so far as concerned the satirical cartoonist, who was now finding metal more attractive in the indiscretions of George IV and Lady Conyngham.

I take this opportunity of acknowledging my indebtedness to many correspondents who have sent me information of which I have availed myself. Some of the letters unfortunately arrived too late to be noticed in their proper places, and among these may be mentioned one from the Right Hon. G. W. E. Russell, who writes: "Perhaps the following may be worth recording. It always struck me as characteristic. Horace Smith (of 'Rejected Addresses') lived at Brighton, and one evening he attended a party given there by the Duchess of St. Albans on her

birthday. At supper he proposed her health. The Duchess was taken unawares, but was equal to the occasion. She began her speech in these words : 'Ladies and Gentlemen, unaccustomed as I am to public speaking—since the days when every one who chose could come and hear me for 6d. in the gallery—'" Mr. Russell adds that he was told this by one of Horace Smith's daughters who lived at Brighton till a few years ago.

Mr. John Place, whose family has long been associated with Nottingham, where Harriet Mellon was a great favourite in her theatrical days, also sends me an incident related by his grandfather, who was a prominent Nottingham citizen at the time when the Duchess of St. Albans returned to the scene of her former triumphs. Mr. Place writes : "A wag of a lawyer made a point of seeing the object of his admiration, and with many laudatory addresses wound up by suggesting that perhaps he might be of service to Her Grace when in London. Would Her Grace say where he might call upon her. . . . Turning to my grandfather, she said, with a ripple of laughter edged with sarcasm, 'The old shop in the Strand would find me.' "

There is not much in these little stories, but they add to the picture I have endeavoured to draw of a remarkable woman of indomitable will, whose one aim was to get all the enjoyment she could out of this world. Her ideals were not very lofty, but it can at least be said of her that she had a sturdy independence which armed her against criticism and ridicule, and she never pretended to be what she was not. She was a keener judge of human nature than people gave her credit for being, and no one knew better than she the power of riches. Of this power she made full, if not always judicious, use.

CHARLES E. PEARCE.

# THE JOLLY DUCHESS

## CHAPTER I

Harriot Mellon as an actress—Her good luck—A notable histrionic period—Clever Irish actresses—The genius of the Irish for the stage—The obscure origin of Eliza Farren, Dorothea Jordan, Harriot Mellon, Frances Abington, and Anne Catley—High society's prejudice against the stage—Audiences and public opinion—Actresses the favourite theme for gossip—Mrs. Abington, Miss Younge, Mrs. Hartley, and Mrs. Lessingham—Extraordinary animosity against actors and actresses in Leeds and Wakefield.

IN her day Harriot Mellon was a popular actress, but it must at once be admitted that she never approached her model, Dorothea Jordan, who was not only delightfully original, but in her originality was as painstaking as she was artistic. Harriot Mellon's range was not extensive. She was excellent in certain comedy characters where nothing beyond naturalness and good humour was required. She was also an excellent mimic and probably one of the best "under-studies," within certain limitations, that ever waited in obscurity for a chance to distinguish themselves. She essayed more than one of the parts identified with Eliza Farren, but the elegance, the studied formality, the artificial graces of the society lady of the period did not come naturally to her, and her imitations of the "genteel" Miss Farren were little more than respectable.

Nor has Harriot Mellon any special claim to attention simply because she became a duchess. The admission of actresses through marriage into aristocratic circles is in these levelling days nothing very remarkable, and the story of those who have been

thus elevated has been told often enough ; but in the case of Miss Mellon there are attendant circumstances which distinguish her from the other ladies who have quitted the theatre to wear the coronet. When Lavinia Fenton, the far-famed Polly Peachum of *The Beggar's Opera*, was taken from the stage by the Duke of Bolton, whose duchess she afterwards became, she was never more heard of so far as the drama was concerned. One looks in vain in the chronicles of the period for any evidence that she took the slightest interest in plays or players. Miss Farren, as the Countess of Derby, was not known as the patroness of the profession through which she gained her husband and her title. Neither can it be said that the Countess of Harrington (Miss Foote) and the Countess of Essex (Miss Stephens) were conspicuous in their affection for their old calling. No reflection can be cast upon these ladies for preferring the retirement of rank ; they followed their own tastes, as of course they had a perfect right to do, but the fact remains, and it is bound to be remembered in the present connection, because of the striking contrast it presents to the steadfast adherence to old associations of Harriot Mellon, whether as Mrs. Coutts, the wife of one of the richest men in England, or as the Duchess of St. Albans. To her last days she never lost the keen zest she had always shown in theatrical matters.

The period between Harriot Mellon's birth and death may emphatically be regarded as a remarkable one in the history of the English stage. The actors and actresses who rose to fame between 1775 and 1837 represent the best exponents, whether in tragedy or comedy, of the histrionic art. Garrick was indeed near the end of his career, but he had not retired ; Henderson was at the height of his popularity ; George Frederick Cooke, despite drink and vanity and truculence, was playing to crowded houses ; and Moody, Lewis the airy, Suett the delight of Charles Lamb, Knight, Munden, Dowton, Dignum, Dodd,

King, John and Charles Bannister, Emery, Fawcett, Liston, John Palmer, Harley, Edwin, Elliston, Holman, Henry Johnstone "the biggest boy in the world," were at the zenith of their powers; and the Kembles, Edmund Kean, Macready, and Charles Mathews, father and son, came within the same period. Even Macklin, born though he was in 1690, is not to be excepted. The list of actresses is no less extensive and representative. Mrs. Crawford, Mrs. Yates, Mrs. Abington, Mrs. Siddons, Miss Farren, Miss Brunton, Mrs. Jordan, Miss Foote, Miss De Camp, Mrs. Davenport, Miss Pope, Miss O'Neill, Miss Wallis, Mrs. Glover, Mrs. Keeley, Fanny and Lydia Kelly, Maria Tree and her sister Ellen Tree, afterwards Mrs. Charles Kean, and many other clever, if less celebrated, women were popular favourites during Harriot Mellon's lifetime. With several of these Harriot acted, and after her retirement from the profession witnessed and enjoyed the performance of those who attained celebrity in the twenties and thirties of the nineteenth century, for there was no more regular attendant at the theatre than she.

Miss Mellon's connection with Drury Lane Theatre covers some of the most interesting years in the history of the house. She became a member of Sheridan's company in 1795 and acted in no other theatre save the Lyceum, whither the company removed when Drury Lane was burnt. She saw the troubles which arose when Byron and Whitbread's Committee were at the head of affairs, and for two years she was in the company under Arnold's management, quitting the theatre in 1815 to become Mrs. Coutts.

She was as much under the public eye as Mrs. Coutts as she was as Harriot Mellon, and probably no one occupied a more prominent place in society than she did. The newspapers were never tired of chronicling her doings, some of them not always in a complimentary tone, and after she became the Duchess of St. Albans, the satirists considered they had full

scope for their pens. It follows that the life of Harriot Mellon can hardly be considered apart from the time in which she lived, and it is this aspect, we venture to think, which justifies an attempt to picture not only her own distinctive personality but her surroundings both of the stage and of society.

It is noteworthy that of the famous comedy actresses who were the idols of the public after Garrick had released the English stage from the hard and heavy fetters imposed upon it by tradition, four were Irishwomen. The impulsive, buoyant, sanguine Irish temperament found a congenial outlet in the portrayal of comedy. For many years dramatists regarded the "comic Irishman" as part of their stock-in-trade, though it is certain nothing like him could be found from one end of Ireland to the other. Indeed, it has been asserted by a well-known writer, himself an Irishman, that the Irishman lacks humour and is wholly deficient in sentiment. However this may be, no one will dispute the charm of an Irishwoman. This charm, which probably comes from her desire to please, mingled with a pardonable love of admiration, is never so well displayed as on the stage. She is emotional, imaginative, and spontaneous and hearty in her mirth, and these qualities were exactly suited to the somewhat boisterous comedy in vogue during the latter half of the eighteenth century and for quite a quarter of the nineteenth.

The stage has given us delightful types of Irish-women, each with her own method of fascination ; the tempestuous Kitty Clive ; the irrepressible Peg Woffington ; the elegant and slightly prim Eliza Farren ; Dorothea Jordan, whose laugh was a ripple of joy ; and Harriot Mellon, the child of Nature, whose animal spirits no reverse could damp—a characteristic which many a time did her good service in lieu of histrionic art. Fanny Maria Kelly was indebted for success to her Irish blood ; Miss O'Neill in the higher walks of the drama doubtless derived her emotional gifts (she has been described

by one critic as "the only actress"—of her day, it may be presumed—"with that genuine feeling that is capable of melting her audience to tears") from the same source; and who shall say that the incomparable Sarah Siddons owed not a little of her power of influencing an audience to the Irish strain on her mother's side? Acting comes as naturally to the Irishwoman as eloquence to the Irishman. There is much truth in Dr. Johnson's observation that "the Irish mix better with the English than the Scotch do; their language is nearer the English, as a proof of which they succeed very well as players which Scotchmen do not."

By a curious coincidence Fate chose to allot to three of the actresses we have singled out as typical of the Irish dramatic faculty, careers almost identical in their main characteristics. Eliza Farren, Dorothea Jordan, and Harriot Mellon were not only lowly born but had to fight their way to fame from the very lowest rung of the professional ladder. They made very early acquaintance with the hardships of poverty and the struggles and the temptations which come from poverty. Miss Farren and Miss Mellon, until they were in their teens, knew no other world than the sordid and makeshift one which surrounded strolling players. Mrs. Jordan's youthful experience was that of the crowd of nondescripts then to be found in all provincial theatres. These nondescripts had no defined occupation; they had no dramatic training other than that of watching the "stars," and they were only too glad to figure on the stage as one of the "mob" when occasion served.

The lot of two other famous comedy ladies of the day, *not* Irish, Frances Abington and Anne Catley, was cast in a lower depth. Mrs. Abington, in her prime the leader and dictator of fashion, whose *mode* ladies of *ton* accepted gratefully and slavishly, did not even graduate in a booth or a barn, but emerged from the darkness of a nomadic life—some time kitchen-maid, some time street-hawker, some time

nothing at all—into a blaze of popularity which Miss Farren, her rival and in some degree her imitator, never attained. As for the reckless and audacious Anne Catley, her father was a hackney coachman and her mother a none too sober washerwoman. Before she was thirteen she sang about the public-houses in the neighbourhood of the Tower, and about her means of livelihood afterwards until Sir Francis Blake Delaval took notice of her the less said the better. Yet she blossomed into an accomplished singer and, like Frances Abington, lived to set the fashion.

If the society ladies of the period deigned to imitate actresses in the cut of a sacque, in the shape of a sleeve, in the dressing of the hair, they regarded the stage itself as belonging to “rogues and vagabonds.” While they had not the slightest objection to figure in the amateur theatricals which became quite the fashionable amusement during the last twenty-five years of the eighteenth century, to enter the profession was not to be thought of. Actors were tolerated, but were kept in their place and never allowed to forget their inferior social position. Horace Walpole regarded the marriage of Lord Ilchester’s daughter with O’Brien the actor as something worse than marrying a footman. Junius dismissed Cibber in a journalistic controversy with the contemptuous injunction to the “Vagabond” to stick to his business. “Even men of education,” says Mr. Forster in his *Life of Goldsmith*, “were known to have pursued Garrick, when on country visits to noblemen of his acquaintance, with dirty, clumsily-folded notes passed amid the ill-concealed laughter of servants to the great man’s guest and addressed ‘Mr. David Garrick, Player.’”

The low opinion of the dramatic profession held by the majority of the nobility, as well as by that vast section of society representing Puritanism, furnishes a curious contradiction to the position which the stage itself occupied in public estimation.

The drama was the one amusement in which all classes revelled, and this amusement they took very seriously. Apart from the pleasure afforded, the drama occasionally played an important part in the social and political questions of the day. The reason is sufficiently obvious. The newspapers were then the merest skeletons. The "leader" and comments on current events were unknown. If grave matters were touched upon it was through the medium of a letter from a "correspondent." Probably three-fourths of the people who crowded the gallery were unable to read, but this ignorance did not prevent them from having their opinions; and when any subject was agitating the public mind, an opportunity was frequently afforded of expressing those opinions by some utterance on the stage in which was discovered an allusion to what was going on. Instances abound of the audience bursting into applause or the reverse when a discovery was made of such coincidences. We need not go back to *The Beggar's Opera* for examples of this. An instance is to be found recorded in *The Times* of October 1, 1794, where we read that "Mrs. Mattocks in the epilogue to Reynolds' new comedy of *The Rage*, after advertizing with not less feeling than honour to the present wretched slavery of the French, states the sentiments of *English* Tom Blunt on such revolutionary proceedings and declares :

‘his resolution  
Still to stand by the *good old Constitution.*’

The whole house was electrified, and testified their unanimous consent to the proposition by long and repeated plaudits and huzzas, and as soon as the curtain fell called for ‘God save the King!’ and every one stood uncovered while it was playing.”

Harriot Mellon had not been at Drury Lane very long before she was witness of a scene in the theatre which led to the withdrawal of *Venice Preserved* in consequence of the feeling a certain passage evoked.

Mrs. Siddons was Belvidera, but notwithstanding her attraction the management dared not venture upon keeping the play running, so uproarious was the applause at the passage

“ Curs’d be your Senate—curs’d your Constitution ; ”

and with reason, for the years 1794–5 were years of starvation and misery in consequence of the prolonged war with France. The theatre indeed was one of the readiest means by which public opinion on any question of the hour could be gauged.

Another contradiction also is apparent in the importance with which the newspapers regarded the doings of popular actresses. When a sprightly paragraph enlivened the dulness of the journals it was pretty sure to have relation to the actress who might happen at the moment to be the talk of the town. Take this for example, from *The London Packet* of October 20, 1777, headed “ Theatrical Intelligence extraordinary from both houses.” We read how :

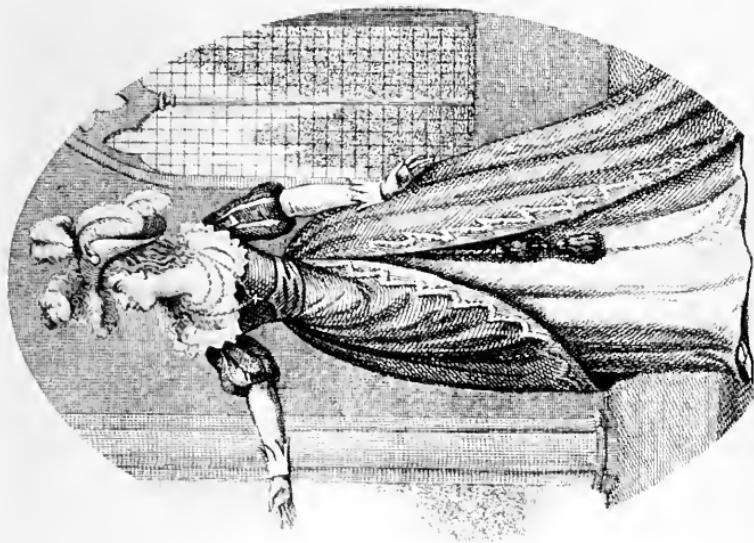
“ The ladies of either theatre are daily vying with each other in the grandeur and elegance of their equipage. The amiable Mrs. Abington rolls to rehearsals and apologises for her *Fashionable airs* by her abundant good nature and condescension.”

“ Miss Younge supports her carriage in the *bon ton* with her initial Y, that Roman character very figuratively representing a lady topsy-turvy with her head upon the floor and her heels extended against the wainscot.”

“ Mrs. Hartley possesses great economy and is happy in a friend who lends her a lift backwards and forwards.”

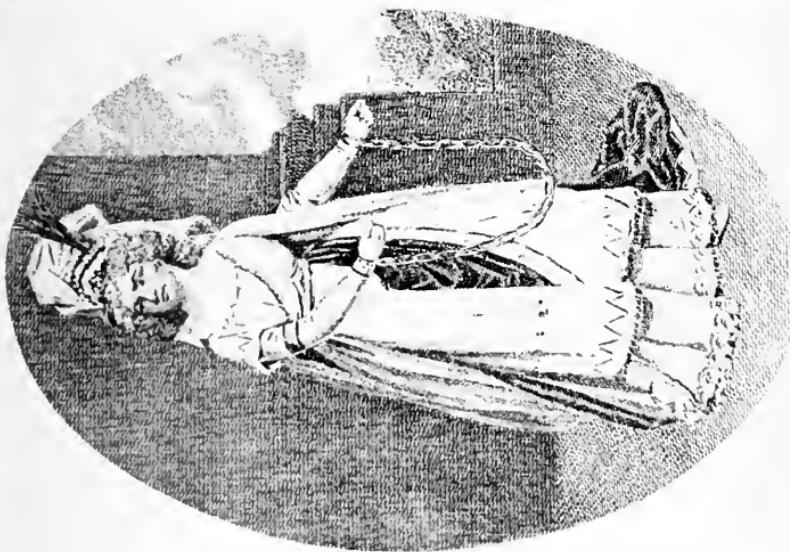
“ Mrs. Barry has again entered the gay world, and horses, furniture, and fortune are perfectly *à la Français*.”

The paragraphist, in making Mrs. Abington apologise for her “ *Fashionable airs*,” evidently reflected the general opinion that an actress had no right to take rank as a fine lady and “ roll ” in her equipage.



MRS. HARTLEY AS ROSAMOND IN "HENRY II."

From an engraving by Pegg, after Roberts.



MRS. POPE AS ZARA IN "THE MOURNING BRIDE."

From an engraving by Thornithwaite, after De Wilde.



His banter of Miss Younge (afterwards Mrs. Pope) is certainly misplaced, for after performing at Drury Lane for forty years the lady retired from the stage into private life with an unblemished character and an easy fortune. According to Jesse, "she is said to have borne a strong resemblance to the beautiful Lady Sarah Lennox, the goddess of George III's early idolatry. Many years after the beauty of both ladies had been on the decline the King happened to attend a performance at Drury Lane when Mrs. Pope was acting. The recollection of his youthful love came back to his mind and in a moment of melancholy abstraction he is said to have observed to the Queen: 'She is like Lady Sarah still.'"

Mrs. Hartley's "friend" probably was William Smith, generally known as Gentleman Smith. Smith broke the unwritten law forbidding men and women of good family to tread the boards. He had received a university education; he was admitted into the highest circles of society, and was considered the most elegant man of the day. He married the sister of Lord Sandwich, but he could not resist the fascinations of the beautiful Mrs. Hartley, for whom, says Boaden, he "made a fool of himself—deserted his wife, with the greatest respect for her all the time, and like a grown boy would have given up the whole world, as he told Garrick, rather than desert his Rose."

Mrs. Hartley herself can hardly be termed vain, though her wonderful beauty justified her being proud of it. She had the golden auburn hair which the early Italian painters loved, and a brilliant complexion. Reynolds painted her portrait very soon after her first triumph and, says Leslie, in his life of Sir Joshua, "when he paid her a compliment on her beauty she turned it laughingly off: 'Nay, my face may be well enough for shape, but sure 'tis as freckled as a toad's belly.'" Moody the actor spoke slightly of her. He admitted she had a good figure "with a handsome small face and very much freckled; her hair red and her neck and shoulders well turned,"

but “there is no harmony in her voice; but when forced (which she never fails to do on the least occasion) is loud and strong, but an inarticulate gabble. She is ignorant and stubborn. She talks lusciously and has a slovenly good nature about her that renders her prodigiously vulgar.” Moody must have had some cause of resentment against the red-haired beauty, for, according to Davies, “the most severe satirist who bestows one look on Mrs. Hartley must be instantly disarmed and turn all his censure to panegyric.”

The writer in *The London Packet* unmasks all his batteries of raillery for Mrs. Lessingham, an indifferent actress and the *chère amie* of Thomas Harris, one of the four patentees of the Covent Garden Theatre, in whose judgment she was worthy of principal parts, an opinion not shared by Colman, another of the patentees. The result was much squabbling, one of the outcomes of which was the postponement of the production of *The Good-Natured Man*, causing much tribulation to Goldsmith; and another the action at law consequent upon Harris’s high-handed proceedings in breaking into the theatre and carting away the wardrobe, music, and prompt-books.

Of this lady the airy journalist says: “Mrs. Lessingham, the *still* sprightly, elegant Mrs. Lessingham, *still* in full possession of all her charms, her fame, and attractions, *still* mistress of all that endearing and bewitching softness of manners, that fire in her eyes, that sincerity in her soul, those roses in her cheeks, and bliss in her bosom which at twenty-five were only in the bud, but in full bloom at fifty, thinks and justly thinks she needs no external trappings *still* to charm the easy captivated soul of man. Despising the glare of Mrs. Yates, Mrs. Abington, Miss Younge, Mrs. Hartley, and Mrs. Barry, she equips herself with a carriage and domestics totally *à l’Anglais*. She has lately taken it into her head to rival those *sol fa la* ladies, Catley, Mattocks, and

Brown, and on Friday last came from the Hampstead villa to communicate her intentions to the great Dr. Arne. She came and humbly came in an old crazy four-wheeled chariot, drawn by a pair of large black, long-tailed, rusty dray-horses, about seventeen hands high, with manes and heels equally bright and polished, equipped with harness that shone like the stars of a pilgrim, all which was borrowed for this brilliant undertaking of a *great small beer brewer at Hampstead. . . .*

Bent upon enlivening the pages of *The London Packet* the writer proceeds: "It is said that Mrs. Lessingham is shortly to appear in the character of Macheath and Mr. Harris is to play the part of Polly. . . . It was Mrs. Lessingham who suggested the alteration in *The Beggar's Opera* (*i.e.* the playing of the men's parts by women). To the morality of that lady and the taste of Mr. Harris the genius of Gay is much indebted. . . . The husband of the *female* Macheath, *Mrs. Farrell is a Taylor* good bud! He measured his wife for the breeches she wears."

Mrs. Lessingham was an energetic and capable woman of business. Bent upon possessing an estate at Hampstead she purchased a piece of land on the heath from the lord of the manor and proceeded to build. The building was approaching completion when the adjoining residents who possessed common rights rose in their wrath and demolished the house, on the ground that only a person already possessing a freehold on the heath could be allowed to purchase heathland and build. Mrs. Lessingham was not to be beaten. She purchased the freehold of a small cottage close by, went to law with her opponents and won the day. The result of her victory was the building of Heath House, now the residence of Sir William Lever.

There was not the slightest prejudice against players on the part of the London middle and lower classes, but in certain parts of England, especially in the Midlands, the objections entertained were amaz-

ing. "Leeds at the end of the eighteenth century was considered," says Mrs. Charles Mathews, in her biography of her husband, "little less than Botany Bay for actors. . . . The extraordinary, nay frightful prejudice cherished . . . made the periodical stay amongst them a matter of serious dread, especially with the females of the theatre."

Holman, on one occasion, not liking the dressing-room provided for him, put on his costume at his lodgings and was taken in a sedan-chair to the theatre. The natives had not seen a chair before, and crowding round the new-fangled thing, compelled the chairmen to set it down so that they might stare at what it contained. No sooner did they catch sight of Holman in the embroidered coat, powdered wig, and rouged face of Lord Townley than they yelled out: "A man wi' his face painted!" The discovery that the chair was carrying a "laker," the name the Leeds people gave to actors, excited their anger to such an extent that only the arrival of assistance prevented them turning the sedan and its occupant into the river. Holman escaped, and as he hurried away he heard one man say to another: "Well, I'm vexed we didn't tipple him into t' water. Where'd be t' harm i' drownin' a laker?"

Wakefield was not much better than Leeds. Charles Mathews was walking there by the riverside with his dog when he was assailed with cries of "Kick that dug; tipple him into t' river; he's naught but a laker's dug." It is difficult to assign any cause for this ruffianly behaviour beyond the innate love of brutality of the Midlanders of those days. But even this does not explain why they should have singled out "lakers" as especial objects of sport.

It may be said that the prejudice against the profession was not altogether a bad thing for the drama. Only those in whom the dramatic instinct was strong found their way to the boards, and thus it happens that we have examples of strong personality, of vivacity, of a fire and energy, of courage, and

independence which place the eighteenth-century actress on a plane by herself. The Barrys, the Bracegirdles, the Oldfields, the Woffingtons, the Clives, the Catleys, the Jordans, the Baddeleys—one need not add to the list—have no parallels in these tamely polite days.

The self-assertiveness and the egotism of strong-willed ladies and their impatience of control naturally brought about a good deal of trouble, and the feminine quarrels of the stage would in themselves fill a volume. Garrick's soul was continually vexed by the vapours and vagaries of Kitty Clive, and his troubles with her and other rebellious petticoats in his company found expression in the well-known lines :

“Three thousand wives kill'd orphans in a rage ;  
Three actresses drove Garrick from the stage ;  
'I have no nerves,' says Younge, 'I cannot act' ;  
'I've lost my limbs,' cries Abington, 'tis fact' ;  
Yates screams: 'I've lost my voice, my throat's so sore' ;  
Garrick declares 'he'll play the fool no more.'”

It may be, of course, that one reason of this excessive irritability and these wayward nerves is to be found in Kitty Clive's characteristic letter to Colman in which the “combustible” actress wrote, with a delightful indifference to orthography : “ vexation and fretting in a theatre are the foundation of all Billous complaints. I speak from expeariance. I have been fretted till my gaul has overflowed like the river Nile.” It is certain, however, that these emotional ladies never made the slightest effort to control their tempers. They allowed their “bursts” to have full play when they felt like it. Tate Wilkinson records how a Mrs. Montagu, engaged in the York Company on the occasion of a benefit for a Mr. Hudson, being cast for the character of the Queen in Hull's Tragedy of *Henry II*, refused to study it, but wanted to read the part. The audience, however, very much objected to this cavalier treatment as the lady had had timely notice given her, and threatened if she did not retire to call in a cook wench from the

nearest alehouse to read the part, whereupon Mrs. Montagu flew into a passion, and placing herself in a tragedy attitude she exclaimed : “ So I may not be permitted to read the Queen ? ” “ No—no—no ! Off—off—off ! ” “ Well then,” she retorted, “ curse you all ! ” and threw the book into the pit, and made her exit. It is satisfactory to be able to add that later on the lady apologised and was restored to favour.

If there is anything in hereditary characteristics Harriot Mellon should take rank with Mrs. Montagu, for her mother was as combustible as Kitty Clive. But it does not appear that in her stage life—at all events in the early part of it—she showed signs, as Mrs. Baron-Wilson puts it, of “ possessing one of the most hasty and violent tempers which can be conceived,” but during the later years when she acquired riches and rank her outbursts were probably not less tempestuous than her mother’s.

## CHAPTER II

Harriot Mellon's early life—Conflicting accounts—Harriot's mother and “Lieutenant Mellon”—Harriot's birth—Mysterious disappearance of her father—In Kena's travelling company—The life of a strolling player—Miss Farren's early days—Carrying the “drum”—Harriot Mellon's first appearance—She sees Mrs. Jordan play at Harrogate—Miss Wallis—Butler the provincial manager and Edmund Kean.

THERE are two versions of Harriot's early life—Mrs. Baron-Wilson's and that of Charles Molloy Westmacott. Mrs. Baron-Wilson's biography is in many respects unsatisfactory. It is diffuse, it is in some places contradictory, it is deficient in dates, and not a few of those given are wrong, authorities are, with two or three exceptions, unnamed, and the narrative is overladen with a sentimentality which we venture to think does an injustice to Harriot Mellon's vigour and tenacity of purpose. The vagueness with which Mrs. Baron-Wilson explains how she came to write Miss Mellon's biography is typical of the whole work. What she says is that upon the death of the Duchess of St. Albans “a slanderous memoir prepared during her life-time . . . . . was immediately advertised. The publication of this anonymous work was stopped by the announcement of another ‘Memoir’ under a name whose literary and moral reputation was a sufficient guarantee for the fidelity of any biography to which it might be attached. This well-timed act for the departed ended, however, with the beneficial result of having checked the effusion of malice and ill-nature; and subsequent circumstances preventing its completion the field became again fairly open.”

We have not been able to verify these statements. A search through the newspapers reveals nothing

beyond a reference in an answer to a correspondent (real or imaginary) in *The Age* of August 27, 1837. “T. C. is right,” runs the paragraph. “All that Miss Sheridan can know of the life of the Duchess of St. Albans must refer to the last six months (the Duchess died on August 6, 1837) when she mixed her brandy and water, flavoured her sago, and perpetrated poetry in her album. The Duchess was too shrewd a woman to trust Miss Sheridan with her life.” At the end of his biography of the Duchess, Westmacott hints at publishing a life of the Duke and his friends, but nothing came of it. Mrs. Baron-Wilson continues :

“The materials from which the following pages have been compiled were collected for and entrusted to me for examination and arrangement. Before, however, I accepted the editorship. . . I applied to the party who had announced the second biography already alluded to and received a written assurance that the work ‘had long since been entirely abandoned,’ and therefore as my projected publication could in no way affect a work totally relinquished I proceeded with my task.

“The rough notes . . . placed in my hands bore the fullest evidence that no trouble had been spared in collecting authentic details. The few surviving companions of the poor provincial actors and the ‘troops of friends’ of the much sought, because rich, Mrs. Coutts and Duchess of St. Albans have since been industriously traced out and consulted; even the foes which envy made when she bore the latter names have been communicated with.”

At first sight this seems fair, but it leaves much to be desired. Who supplied Mrs. Baron-Wilson with the “materials”? Not the “party who had announced the second biography.” Whoever may have collected the “authentic details,” it is obvious where names are not given nor the sources of information stated that there can be no guarantee of authenticity. In any case these materials do not touch the period of Harriot’s birth and infancy.

There was only one person who could give information on these points and this was Harriot's mother. But when Mrs. Baron-Wilson published her book Mrs. Mellon, afterwards Mrs. Entwistle, had been dead twenty-nine years and the Duchess of St. Albans seven. The details of the mother's romantic marriage and of Harriot's birth must consequently rest on the veriest hearsay. Mrs. Mellon was fond of "romancing" after the Irish fashion, as Mrs. Baron-Wilson indeed says, on the evidence of Harriot herself, and it is certainly not safe to accept everything the good lady chose to assert, as the gospel truth.

On the other hand the evidence of Charles Molloy Westmacott is as little to be trusted. Westmacott was the editor of *The Age*, and for years he had persistently attacked Harriot, both as Mrs. Coutts and afterwards as the Duchess of St. Albans, and what he wrote as her biography was published while she was lying dead. If it be true, as he asserted, that he knew her in Tate Wilkinson's company at York, as "Harriet Malone," and that Wilkinson changed her name to "Mellon" for stage purposes, then his statement ought to be seriously considered. But it is no more possible to prove Westmacott's veracity than it is to substantiate Mrs. Mellon's romancing, and as the two versions are so diametrically opposed to each other it is inevitable that one must be discarded. In view, therefore, of Westmacott's not altogether unblemished reputation we prefer to take Mrs. Baron-Wilson's story (without, however, endorsing it) and to reproduce Westmacott's in the form of an appendix with reference to it now and again when necessary.

Mrs. Baron-Wilson's narrative starts with the incident of a company of strolling players putting up for a night at a village a few miles distant from Cork; the year is doubtful, but we fancy we shall not be far wrong if we place it certainly before 1770. The manager, Mr. Kena, was well known in Ireland and Wales, and the news spreading that there was a

chance of seeing play-acting, the villagers thronged to the barn where it was announced the performance was to take place. Manager Kena knew his public and did not ask for coin. The payment for admission was in kind—milk, eggs, potatoes, anything in fact that could be spared, and the seats assigned in a sort of rough-and-ready fashion of gradation governed by the value of the contributions. In one of the front rows sat an Irish cottier, his wife and daughter Sarah, a handsome, rosy-cheeked, dark-haired, dark-eyed girl of eighteen, to whom the moving drama of hapless love was a glimpse of an unknown world. Probably not many of Shakespeare's lines were spoken in their entirety, for the *Romeo and Juliet* of the barn was "adapted" to suit the exigencies of the surroundings, the limited capacities of the actors and the tastes of the audience, but the plot remained the same, and this was everything.

The strolling players departed, and shortly afterwards Sarah's father, one of the poverty-stricken class known as cottiers, died, and Sarah and her mother went to Cork, where the latter also died and where Sarah was left stranded. She became a milliner's assistant, and one day she saw Mrs. Kena, the wife of the travelling manager, pass the shop. The performance in the barn had sent the young woman stage-struck and, introducing herself to Mrs. Kena, she offered her services in leading parts, especially Juliet, an offer which Mrs. Kena declined, suggesting, however, that Sarah with her knowledge of dressmaking might be useful in other capacities, and the result was that she joined the strolling company as wardrobe-keeper and money-taker. Despite her aspirations she never had the opportunity of going on the stage, save as "one of the crowd," but in her own sphere she proved very useful.

Manager Kena, who was one of the most careless and unbusinesslike of men, owned he had never had his receipts so honestly managed before. He was a typical "pro"; he could work very hard when he

wanted money, but directly his pocket was full he disbanded his company and enjoyed himself till every penny was gone. Then he started again on the process of earning and spending. After Sarah had been with the company some little time, one of these periods of luxury arrived after a series of performances in Wales ; the troupe was dismissed, and probably thinking something was due to his money-taker for her excellent management, Kena paid Sarah her travelling expenses back to Cork, and the disappointed young woman took up mantua-making once more with her former mistress.

The mantua-maker was a Wesleyan, and Sarah dared not breathe a word to her of what she had been doing. Her story that she had been “travelling with a lady in Wales” was accepted without question—probably her mistress thought it more to her own interest in view of Sarah’s usefulness not to be too curious—and things settled down into their old groove. Soon came a break in the monotony in the shape of a love affair. A handsome young gentleman who had engaged apartments in the house opposite the mantua-maker’s, passed his spare time—and he had a good deal—in casting admiring glances at the attractive young assistant. The young gentleman gave his name as “Lieutenant Mathew Mellon of the Madras Native Infantry,” saying that he was in Europe on sick leave, and was travelling in Ireland for “change of air.”

There was considerable mystery about “Lieutenant Mellon,” but this made him all the more interesting. Sarah was fascinated by the handsome lieutenant and he by her, and before long they were lovers, their love-making being the more blissful because it was secret. The gentleman was all for a private marriage, and suggested that while his wife was supporting herself in London (she having an opportunity to accompany the Kenas to the metropolis) by needlework, he would join his regiment in India and send for her when he had the money.

Accordingly the marriage took place on January 6, 1777 (so says Mrs. Baron-Wilson, but we believe the date to be wholly imaginary), and soon after the wedding the newly married couple travelled with the Kenas to London and took lodgings in the neighbourhood of Vauxhall, not far from the Lambeth Palace, and here Harriot was born.<sup>1</sup> Sarah Mellon's married bliss was of short duration. In less than three months the gallant lieutenant, with many kisses, vows of constancy, and hopes of a speedy re-union, took his leave, proceeded to Portsmouth, where the ship was awaiting to convey him to India, and his young wife never saw him again. She heard afterwards that he had died of consumption on the voyage, but the statement was never verified. Mystery shrouded "Lieutenant Mellon." It was by no means certain that he was a lieutenant or that he was ever in the Army, and his name may not have been Mellon.

All this indefiniteness made up a romance which was by no means distasteful to the imaginative Sarah, and as time went on she convinced herself that her husband was a nobleman, but his rank and name she kept to herself. She did not, however, fail to impress upon her daughter, especially when she was in a passion with the child—by no means an uncommon thing—that Harriot had "high blood" in her veins. However this may be, Mrs. Mellon found herself with a child to maintain and no means of earning a livelihood. As luck would have it, however, the good-hearted Kenas were in London at the time and, being about to start on a country tour with the idea of forming a company out of the waifs and strays of the profession they might chance to pick up on the road, and, knowing Sarah's usefulness, they took her with them, not at a salary, for salaries were unknown quantities with the strolling player, but on the usual "sharing" terms.

<sup>1</sup> Westmacott puts her birthplace at Kendal, Westmorland. See Appendix.

Many eighteenth-century actors and actresses, afterwards famous, graduated in the barn and tavern-yard, frequently the only places available for performances. While Harriot Mellon was being carried from one town to another by her mother with the Kenas, Eliza Farren, then nineteen, was establishing her reputation in London in comedy parts, where elegance and grace and familiarity with the *mode* were indispensable. Yet Miss Farren before she entered her teens was a strolling player. "Petronius Arbiter" in his spiteful biography of her gives one a very good idea of the experiences of the poor stroller.

Her mother, he says, "belonged to a sharing company, and as every one shared the profits, every one partook of the labours. The scenery and wardrobe of a company of this kind cannot be supposed to be very ponderous articles; if, therefore, at any time the funds of the company were so low as not to furnish the necessary sum for the hire of any kind of vehicle to convey the live and dead stock from town to town, each member took a portion of the scenery or wardrobe on his back and trudged on to where they intended to establish themselves; nor were the ladies excused on such occasions. Whenever this circumstance occurred in a company to which Mrs. Farren for many years belonged it always fell to the lot of Lady Derby to carry the *drum*!"

"This carrying the *drum* may to such as are not acquainted with the paraphernalia of a comedy company be unintelligible. We therefore explain it. As the finances of the company are always slender and the strictest economy is necessary a very small number of bills are made to answer the purpose of announcing the intended representation. But to make amends for this defect which fortune compels them to they distribute their bills by beat of *drum* in order that their arrival and intentions may be known to every inhabitant. A *drum* on this

account always makes part of the property of a comedy company, and her ladyship, from being so very young, being a favourite with the manager, had always the care of it entrusted to her and carried it on her head in their wanderings from place to place." "Petronius Arbiter" adds in a footnote: "Some companies which wish to appear very respectable add at the bottom of their printed bills, 'N.B. The Company do not use a *Drum.*'"

Mr. Kena's travelling company doubtless had its ups and downs, but in good and ill fortune the useful Sarah Mellon and her little daughter shared its vicissitudes. In Lancashire fate ordained that the handsome Sarah should take a second husband in the person of Thomas Entwistle, a clever violinist who, says Mrs. Baron-Wilson, "much assisted" the orchestra, which in all probability meant that Mr. Entwistle was himself the orchestra, for strolling players could rarely afford more than one musician. The violinist was eighteen and the lady money-taker and dresser twenty-nine, and Mr. Entwistle must have been possessed of more than ordinary courage to ally himself with the tempestuous Sarah and to undertake the responsibility of a stepfather to Harriot, who at this time was four and a half years old. But in all probability the young man did not trouble. Mrs. Mellon, now Mrs. Entwistle, was masterful enough for any responsibility, and she not only managed her child but her husband as well.

In all probability the marriage took place in Wigan, as we are told by a correspondent of *Notes and Queries* that an illustrated history of Wigan compiled about 1829, which was sold to the town by a descendant of the writer of the work, has on the back of a view of the parish church and neighbouring houses an inscription written in a contemporary hand as follows: "The house marked X in this view was occupied by the late Thomas Entwistle, fiddler, painter, and engraver, father to Thomas Entwistle who was also a fiddler and married Mrs. Mellon,

mother to Miss Mellon who was a performer of boys' and girls' characters on the stage at Wigan."

Mrs. Mellon became Mrs. Entwistle in 1782, and soon after the marriage Kena's company travelled through Wales with not very great success. Kena was attacked by one of his periodical fits of laziness; Mrs. Entwistle since her marriage had not been able to look after the treasury; and things became so bad that the Entwistles parted company with the improvident manager and tried their luck in Lancashire. At Preston they met a strolling company, the manager of which had been described as the "eccentric Thomas Bibby"—these managers appear to have been all, more or less, "characters"—and Entwistle was engaged as leader of the orchestra, such as it was.

Mr. Edward Stirling in his *Old Drury Lane* has an interesting reference to the Mellons at this period of struggle. "In the house where I lived (Bolton-le-Moors) there once dwelt," he says, "a poor strolling actress named Mellon; her little child a pretty girl, daily left to the kindly protection of the landlady, who fed Harriot Mellon with her own children, principally on porridge. Mrs. Mellon, ill paid, ill fed, could hardly keep herself. 'Many and many a meal I've given the poor child when its mother was a play-acting up at playhouse,' said the good woman in her garrulous fashion. When fickle Fortune smiled, be it recorded to her honour that Harriot Mellon did not forget the humble landlady at Bolton-le-Moors."

A significant sidelight is thrown upon the life of the strolling player by the rule enforced by Mr. Manly, whose company travelled the Nottingham Circuit. He would never engage married or old people, as in the course of the year some 500 miles had to be traversed on foot, for their salaries would never permit coach rides.

The "sharing out" system lasted for some time into the nineteenth century, and as a rule the division was managed after the fashion adopted by "Greasy Sam Johnstone," a well-known manager of a strolling

company of players in the west of Scotland. Every night the manager counted out the nightly receipts in the presence of the entire company. The expenses were first taken out of the cash, such as hire of room, musicians, candles, etc. What remained (if anything) was divided into equal shares and handed to each individual. The manager of course took the lion's share—that is, he had a share for the company's wardrobe, a share for his scenery, a share for his play-books and music, a share for his wife (she generally took the money at the door) and a share for his daughter as the "walking lady" of the company. In this way the manager appropriated seven shares of the receipts. There certainly could not have been much left for the members of the company.

"Petronius Arbiter" gives a slightly different version of the system, but the result so far as the rank and file of the company were concerned was much the same. He tells us that there "are generally sixteen persons in a company, including the manager. The profits are divided into twenty shares, of which the manager, for scenery, wardrobe, etc., takes four, and one as a performer; of the remaining fifteen shares each member takes one, and it is to be observed that every actor takes an equal share whether he performs first, second, or third rate parts. Thus Macbeth and the Murderer, Hamlet and the Sentinel, Lear and one of the Knights, all take an equal division of the spoil."

The difficulties managers of wandering companies met with in dealing with the local magnates, whose permission had to be obtained before the "rogues and vagabonds" could perform, were enormous. The Mayor of Wolverhampton closed the King's Head Yard against Roger Kemble and declared that "neither player, puppy, nor monkey," should perform in the town. Yet Mrs. Siddons was in the company! But she was not then famous.

Scores of cases of the exercise of this prohibitory power could be cited. Tom Dibdin writes with great



HARRIOT MELLON.  
(The earliest portrait extant )  
From an engraving by Ridley, after Allingham.



sorenness on the matter. Mayors and magistrates asserted their autocratic authority for at least the first twenty-five years of the nineteenth century. Edward Stirling tells how he once applied to a Romford magistrate for permission to perform in the Town Hall and was met in this extraordinary fashion : “ What, sir ! bring your beggarly actors into this town to demoralise the people ? No, sir. I’ll have no such profligacy in Romford. Poor people shall not be wheedled out of their money by your trash.”

We get a very good idea of the opinion held of strolling companies by eighteenth-century society people in an entry in Mrs. Philip Lybbe Powy’s diary. While staying at Henley she records that “ All the gentlemen came to see the farce, a very full house and better programme than one would have imagined—*The Jew* and *The Poor Soldier*. The company put £100 into the Henley Bank to answer any demands upon them and as a surety of their good behaviour. Rather unusual for strollers in general”—that they should possess £100 in ready cash we presume.

In spite of these drawbacks some of the old strolling-company managers were of opinion that actors who had not gone through the preliminary drill of the wandering life were of not much account. Richardson, the famous showman of Bartholomew Fair, was always very proud of having numbered Edmund Kean among his company. When Macready’s name had become well known, Richardson was asked if he had ever seen him. “ No, master,” he answered, “ I knows nothing about him ; in fact he’s some wagabone as nobody knows—one of them chaps as ain’t had any eddication for the thing. He never was with me as Edmund Kean and them riglars was.” There was something in this quaint pronouneement. The strolling player certainly learned how to play to the real critics of the eighteenth-century audiences—the pit and gallery.

The circuits were not affected by the restrictions

just mentioned. Macready, writing of his early experiences, says that at the beginning of the nineteenth century a theatre was considered indispensable in towns of very scant proportions, and generally “a sufficient number of theatres were united in a circuit to occupy a company during a whole year, so that a respectable player could calculate upon his weekly salary without default from year’s end to year’s end.” Mr. Bibby’s company, however, was not sufficiently substantial to aspire to this happy condition of things.

Bibby’s company appears to have stayed a considerable time at Ulverstone, as it was here Harriot first went to school. She was now ten years old, but looked thirteen, when the great event of her girlhood happened—she made her first appearance on the stage in a distinct part. Bibby chose a piece exactly suited to her capacity—*The Spoiled Child*—in which she was to play Little Pickle. This was on October 16, 1787, at the Ulverstone Theatre. The romping part, hardly above the level of an acting charade, was a pure bit of fun to the child, and no wonder she went through the performance without the slightest bashfulness. She wore a laurel green tunic made by her proud mother, and with her bright eyes, her brilliant complexion, and her dark curls surmounted by a fancy riding-cap, she must have presented a very engaging picture. Moreover, she had a very clear, musical voice. The success of the little debutante was complete; the manager presented her with ten shillings, which her mother promptly pocketed—a practice she continued for some years after Harriot’s first appearance.

The eccentric Bibby was so delighted with the promise displayed by the youngest member of his company that he made a second experiment, and fixed upon Priscilla Tomboy in *The Romp* for her next effort. There does not appear to have been any attempt to exploit the child as an “infant phenomenon.” She was too developed. Besides, the rage

for precocity had not commenced. It was to come fifteen years later with Master Betty, Miss Mudie, and other precocious nuisances.

Such farces as *The Spoiled Child* and *The Romp* read childishly enough now, but it was this very childishness which made them popular. They were on a level with the audience. In a way the allusions in *The Romp* mirror the times. "Her husband was a great sugar baker in Ratcliff Highway," says one of the characters, and the words bring to mind an extinct London industry. "Don't you think these clothes become me, Miss Prissy?" asks the city swain whom Priscilla befools. "You look very jemmy in them," says she, and sets one wondering where the slang word of the day came from. Then we have La Blond, a young milliner, telling us what a day's idle pleasuring in London meant a century and a half ago. "In the morning," says she, "I went to the gallery at St. James to see the great go to chapel, for we were obliged to get a pattern of one of her Majesty's caps for Mrs. Iscariot, the Jew gentlewoman, that lives upon Fish Street Hill. In the evening Ensign Scald of the Middlesex Militia took Sister Sukey and I to the 'Dog and Duck,' and coming home we went for a little fun in at the Quakers' Meeting."

In the visit to the Chapel Royal, St. James's, Miss La Blond combined business with pleasure, and no doubt the "cap" she studied was the prim "mob" variety introduced by Queen Charlotte in her effort to put down the prodigious structure which ladies of fashion were wont to erect upon their heads. The "Dog and Duck" was, of course, the popular and by no means refined place of resort in St. George's Fields, Southwark, and the fun to be got out of a Quakers' meeting was regarded at that time as perfectly legitimate.

For two years Harriot did nothing but play "tomboy" parts. Manager Bibby found her an acquisition and put on pieces which gave her experi-

enée, and in addition she was enabled to acquire a repertoire of a kind. This was the rule with the old-time actors. No such thing as the same piece running for a whole season and more was known. Until the *School for Scandal* was produced the solitary exception was *The Beggar's Opera*, but the attraction of Gay's masterpiece was perennial. Every actor and actress had a more or less extensive list of characters to draw upon. Lewis, the elegant and gay, and the creator of many parts—Goldfinch in *The Road to Ruin*, Frederick in *The Poor Gentleman*, Jeremy Diddler in *Raising the Wind*, among others—had no less than 194 characters, ranging from tragedy to farce, any one of which he could play at a moment's notice, and all of which he had played at some time or another at Drury Lane.

That now extinct line of character the "chambermaid," sometimes with "songs," was then a recognised piece of legitimate acting, and it was laid down that all "chambermaid" parts must be played in the same way—indeed the dramatists left no other alternative, for such parts were all written on an orthodox pattern and with orthodox "business." The comedies of the day were full of intrigue and bustle, and the "chambermaid," singing or otherwise, was in the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth, regarded as indispensable to supply the necessary low comedy.

Dr. J. Hill, who dubbed himself "Sir J. Hill," the clever scribbler and quack, the subject of Garrick's well-known couplet,

" For physic and farces his equal there scarce is ;  
His farces are physic, his physic a farce is,"

in *The Actor, or a Treatise on the Art of Playing*, devotes a chapter to "the characters of footmen and chambermaids." Concerning the latter he writes : " Though youth or beauty are not necessary to the woman who plays these characters there are certain requisites as indispensable to them as there are to

the superior players, and these must come, like their best qualifications, from nature, though they may be greatly improved by practice. Among these the principal are an important pertness of manner and a volubility of tongue. . . . We expect in them also an archness of look. Low cunning is the characteristic of these parts as dignity is of heroes."

The rules laid down for the footman—a term of rather wide significance, as the "footman" from the stage point of view included the valet—are equally rigid. "The characteristics of the footman," we are told, "are submission and attention and cringing humility and an observant obedience. While a footman is upon the stage he should be always in motion; it is said of all characters, but it is true of his; an agility of body, therefore, is proper unless in peculiar characters of footmen." In this respect there is certainly a strong family likeness in Sharp in *The Lying Valet*, Puff in *Miss in Her Teens*, Fag in *The Rivals*, and many others.

Apropos of "Sir" J. Hill, the doctor's wife, "Lady" Hill, was a somewhat illiterate woman, and Foote poked his fun at her and at two other ladies of no better education, Lady Cheere and Lady Fielding, the wife of Sir John Fielding, the Bow Street magistrate. The incorrigible humorist represented the three as playing at "I love my love with a letter." Lady Cheere began "I love my love with an N because he is a Night"; Lady Fielding followed with "I love my love with a G because he is a Gustis"; and "Lady" Hill capped these triumphs of orthography with "I love my love with an F because he is a Fizishun."

The "hoyden" was also a well-established part. Miss Prue (*Love for Love*), Peggy (*The Country Girl*), Miss Tittup (*Bon Ton*), Priscilla Tomboy (*The Romp*), Miss Hoyden (*A Trip to Scarborough*), are but a few of the examples which can be cited. It may be remarked that the most daring expressions come from the lips of these young ladies, the dramatist doubtless

thinking that audacity derived force from its contrast with innocence and ingenuousness. Possibly Swift had the same intention in his *Art of Polite Conversation* in allotting to "Miss" the broadest utterances to be found in this odd piece of satire.

Harriot Mellon graduated in such characters as these and it is doubtful whether she ever freed herself entirely from their influence. Twenty years after we find *The Monthly Mirror*, in criticising her acting of Lady Delmar in *Time's a Telltale*, a comedy by Henry Siddons, saying that "the character was very unfit for Miss Mellon, who, though she has at present a family look, is only seen to advantage in ladies' maids." As a rule, however, she was wise enough to know her own limits. Nature had intended her to be "jolly." Had she had a different physique, a face that was not all smiles, and a voice that had not a laugh lurking in its musical tones, she might have attempted, and with success, some part of greater importance than Lydia Languish, Peggy, Nell in *The Devil to Pay*, and Volante in *The Honeymoon*, which are the characters by which she is best identified.

While acquiring a knowledge of the mechanism of the actor's art Harriot had the good fortune to see Mrs. Jordan play at the Harrogate Theatre, which Butler, a well-known manager in the Northern Circuit, had taken for the season. Thomas Dibdin the elder was in the company, so also was Miss Wallis, a popular actress of the day, and Miss Hilliar, whom Dibdin afterwards married.

Miss Wallis was by no means a great tragedian, but she had a very successful career, excelling in such parts that did not demand deep sentiment and emotion. Like many another famous actress Miss Wallis was born in the profession, her father being a country actor. She made her first appearance in Dublin, she was an instant success at Covent Garden, and fame must have preceded her to Harrogate, for in the theatre she was treated with more than ordinary deference. But there might have been another

reason—she was staying with one of the gentry of the district, Lady Loughborough. If there was one thing the provincial manager craved for it was the patronage of the “nobility and gentry,” and of course Mr. Butler bowed before the shrine of patronage. It was something to say that the celebrated Miss Wallis who had taken London by storm with her performance of *Sigismund*, was not only in his company but was received as a friend by her ladyship. As evidence of his respect he had the following intimation posted in the green room: “Notice. The gentlemen of the theatre are requested not to wear their hats while Miss Wallis is in the house.” As the gentlemen in question one and all discovered reasons for disobeying the manager’s behest, it may be presumed that Miss Wallis was more amused than impressed by Mr. Butler’s exaggerated deference. At any rate the notice was soon taken down.

In Mr. Butler’s eyes Miss Wallis was probably of more importance than the fascinating Dorothea Jordan, but to Harriot Mellon the incomparable personator of *Nell*, of *Peggy*, of Sir Harry Wildair, and of a dozen other parts of dash and energy, must have been all in all. There were probably few points where Mrs. Jordan made her effects which missed the girl’s keen eyes. Moreover, Harriot was an excellent mimic, and of this Dibdin furnishes evidence. He writes: “On another occasion during the same summer they (the Entwistles) came again to Harrogate on the arrival of some London performers, and after the play was over they supped with the narrator, who had invited several of the Harrogate company to meet Miss Mellon and her mother. During the evening the observant young girl gave . . . clever spirited imitations of some of the acting she had first witnessed.”

Butler, like most of the provincial managers, made his own rules, and one was to pay no more than fifteen shillings a week to any of his company. Of course “stars” made their own terms. Of Butler, how-

ever, it may be said that if the salaries were small they were certain. Fifteen shillings was the weekly sum Edmund Kean received when he was engaged to do the “walking gentleman,” to play harlequin, and to sing comic songs. In 1821 Kean paid a starring visit to Northallerton, the circuit then being under the direction of Butler’s son Samuel. The theatre was a small one and the prices were doubled. The day after the first performance Sam Butler waited on Kean with £40—half of the receipts. When the manager was shown into the “star’s” room at the hotel he placed the money on the table and handed Kean the paper with an account of cash taken at the door. Kean looked at it and said, pointing to the money :

“Put that in your pocket.”

Butler stared, and Kean continued :

“In this very town, when as a stripling your father assisted me in accomplishing a journey to London, on parting I told him if ever Fortune smiled on me that I would not forget him. Fortune has smiled on me, and I am proud of paying to the son the debt so many years due to the father. Put up the money, and now we shall proceed to the terms of the engagement.” Walter Donaldson, who was in Sam Butler’s company at the time, vouches for the truth of this story.

All the accounts seem to show that the Butler company were a happy family. Meadows, a very popular comedian in London in after years, was a member and declared that “after being attached to Theatres Royal in his time he never knew what *real* happiness was till he came to this circuit.” After the death of the elder Butler the circuit became disjointed and the company disorganised, but a lady of rank at Ripon, one of the de Grey family—a Miss Lawrence—took what remained of the establishment under her protection and settled on each performer twenty-five guineas a year. “Such liberality to actors,” says Donaldson, “is without parallel.”



MRS. JORDAN AS NELL IN "THE DEVIL TO PAY."

From an engraving by Rogers, after Steeden.



## CHAPTER III

Mrs. Jordan at Harrogate—Harriot Mellon leaves Bibby's company and joins Stanton's—Eccentric strolling managers—Manly, Robertson, Thornton, O'Neill—Holcroft's severe criticism of Stanton and his company—Harriot's success at Stafford—Her friendship with the influential Wrights—Sheridan's visit to Stafford—He sees Harriot act, and she is introduced to him—Harriot goes to London.

WE are not told the date when Harriot saw Mrs. Jordan at the Harrogate Theatre, but we may assume it was in 1789, during which year the actress undoubtedly visited the town. It is possible that Mrs. Jordan was also in Harrogate in 1785, for we know it was in that year that Mrs. Siddons saw her act at York, the tragedian in her emphatic way declarering "that she had better stay there than venture on the London boards"; but as Harriot (if we may rely on Mrs. Baron-Wilson's dates) was then only seven years old, it is pretty safe to fix the time four years later. Even then she would be but eleven, which somewhat throws doubt on the statement that she was born in 1777. Mrs. Jordan in 1789 would be six-and-twenty and was entering upon the flood tide of her popularity, for despite Mrs. Siddons's opinion, she had at once captured the London public on her first appearance at Drury Lane as Peggy in *The Country Girl*.

Mrs. Jordan's visit to Harrogate in 1789, which it can hardly be doubted had a great influence on Harriot Mellon's career, was totally unexpected. It was attended by circumstances which show that she was possessed of amazing energy and determination. According to Boadcn she was about to take her usual

summer tour to the north where she was due to play at Edinburgh when she heard that her old manager, Tate Wilkinson, crippled by an accident, was to take a benefit at Leeds, and she instantly wrote to say that she would play for him. The date of the benefit was July 6, and at two o'clock of that day she had not arrived. The manager, in great distress, postponed the performance till the following Wednesday and announced a different play for Monday. At half-past four, however, a messenger rushed into his room with a note from Mrs. Jordan, saying that she had just reached Leeds. Notwithstanding that she had been travelling post from London and was in an interesting condition she was ready to act Sir Harry Wildair and Nell that very evening, and she was surprised to see other pieces announced.

The manager was in a dilemma, for, not expecting Mrs. Jordan, he had not rehearsed either *The Constant Couple* or *The Devil to Pay*, and his company had not performed either piece for some years. By great pressure she was induced to stay until Wednesday (in spite of her incurring a penalty of £500 if she failed to appear in Edinburgh on the night arranged), but only on condition she was paid thirty guineas, as she would be put to great inconvenience by the delay. This was demurred to and she agreed to take twenty guineas, and on Wednesday, according to Boaden, she "astonished the precise ladies of Leeds with Sir Harry Wildair and his gallantries," an astonishment which, for reasons other than her vivacious rendering of the part, one may readily believe.

The detention at Leeds was followed by one at Harrogate, where a subscription purse from the different hotels tempted her to stay. She was in consequence late for her engagement at Edinburgh and narrowly escaped having to pay the forfeit.

Harriot grew apace and by the end of 1789 had been promoted to play older parts, among them Phoebe in *As You Like It*, Narcissa in *Inkle and Yarico*, and Gillian in *The Quaker*. Bibby's company jour-

neyed on to Blackburn, and Mrs. Entwistle, who ever had an eye to the main chance, considered that Harriot ought to have a higher salary, although it was certain only her mother would benefit. It is not stated what amount the girl had hitherto been paid, but as the "eccentric" Bibby now offered only four-and-sixpence a week it must have been miserably small. The disgusted Mrs. Entwistle was prepared with a counterstroke, and she promptly marched off with the rising young actress, and in addition carried away the entire orchestra in the shape of her fiddler husband.

Mrs. Entwistle had laid her plans to join Stanton's company. Stanton occupied a much higher position in the nomadic theatrical world than Thomas Bibby, and accordingly the three made their way to Stafford, where Stanton was with his troupe. Both the violinist and Harriot were lucky enough to please the manager, and he promised them each an engagement, which promises he duly fulfilled, Harriot going back to her juvenile parts and receiving half a share as payment, and her stepfather playing second fiddle in the quartette which formed the orchestra, with a whole share. Some two years later the sharing system was abandoned and the young actress was paid fifteen shillings a week.

We may here remark that in a brief biography of the Duchess of St. Albans which appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine* for September 1837, neither Kena's nor Bibby's company is mentioned. Harriot is represented as belonging to a company of which Mr. Goldfinch was manager and that she went from Goldfinch's company to that of Stanton. The writer also says that while with Goldfinch she was on the point of marriage with a provincial actor. Mrs. Baron-Wilson says that Harriot joined Stanton's company in 1789, and if this be so and the writer in *The Gentleman's* is correct about Goldfinch, she would not have been more than eleven at the time when she was contemplating marriage! Theatrical history is

full of discrepancies which it is vain to attempt to reconcile.

We have not come across any recorded instances of Bibby's eccentricities, but we do not doubt that he justified his reputation. Of the vagaries of another worthy, Jemmy White, who ran the Nottingham Theatre in 1790, there is good evidence. Jemmy used to say to his anxious company on Saturday night as he counted the money : "There's so much for me, acting and management ; there's so much for rent, oil and candles ; then there's so much for dresses and scenery—a trifle for wear and tear ; then there's so much left for you ; take it, divide it among yourselves—mind, all fair—and thank God you've got it. Good night." But this was a mild form of eccentricity compared to his blacking himself all over whenever he played Othello, Zanga in *The Revenge*, or Mungo in *The Padlock* ! This, he said, gave him a better idea of what a negro or Moor should feel and be. Jemmy dressed for his characters at home, walking through the streets to the theatre, perfectly unconcerned at the remarks of the crowd.

Mr. Edward Stirling speaks of a curious company playing at Northampton in the early part of the nineteenth century. The manager's name was Jackman and all the members of the company but two were Jackmans also. The family wrote plays, acted the best parts, delivered bills, painted scenery, in fact did all and everything. They adapted *The Devil to Pay* to suit their own requirements and produced it under the title of *Jobson and Nell*. The scenes between the cobbler Jobson and his termagant of a wife were thoroughly to the taste of the Nottingham "gods," mostly working shoemakers, who applauded the castigation of Nell enthusiastically. It was to them, no doubt, a touch of nature. On one occasion, Jobson had forgotten his strap ; Nell's tongue was wagging furiously, and her outraged husband was helpless. Suddenly the situation was grasped by a sympathiser in the gallery, who sprang upon his feet,

flung his strap on the stage, and yelled, "Here, Master Jaikman, leather her with mine!"

Manly and Robertson, who ran the Stamford Theatre in the Nottingham Circuit, were also notable managers. Robertson could write a comic song, paint a scene, dance a hornpipe, and do low comedy. He was the author of a song "Beggars and Ballad-Singers," that became popular in London, Dublin, and in every part of the three kingdoms. Jack Bannister made a hit in the song and coolly appropriated the authorship of it. When Robertson retired from theatrical management he opened a shop in Nottingham where he sold all sorts of articles and placed over his door the following legend in large letters: "Everything made here except a fortune."

Manly, who went on managing after Robertson's retirement, was a man of superior attainments combined with shrewdness. It was he who made the rule already mentioned about old and married people, but he excepted one member of the company, an actor named Earle, who kept his position for forty-one years. But Earle had a special qualification—he had originally been a barber, and he cut the hair of his fellow actors and actresses! Wrench, subsequently one of London's favourites, was in Manly's company. "I like Wrench," Charles Lamb represents a friend of Elliston's saying to the latter one day, "because he is the same natural, easy creature *on* the stage as he is *off*." "My ease exactly," retorted Elliston. "I am the same person *off* the stage that I am *on*." Lamb pertinently adds: "The inference at first sight seems identical; but examine it a little and it confesses only that the one performer was never and the other always *acting*."

Manly took a lady partner into management, a Mrs. Taylor, an actress of considerable talent. Mrs. Taylor had a daughter to whom Wrench paid his addresses, Manly devoting himself to the mother. The cards, however, became shuffled, Manly married the daughter, and Wrench the mother. Manly

appears to have got the best of the exchange, as Wrench's marriage did not turn out a bed of roses. Donaldson in telling us that Manly's Major O'Flaherty in *The West Indian* was a more brilliant piece of acting than that of Jack Johnstone—said to be “the only actor who could personate with the utmost effect both the patrician and plebeian Irishman”—incidentally lets us know the characteristics of the comic actors of the end of the eighteenth century. “Manly,” he says, “repudiated all that eternal twisting about on the stage, grinning, and bustle which London comedians resort to in order to make the points, as they call them, when at the same time they render themselves ridiculous in the eyes of persons of discrimination.”

Thornton of the Reading Circuit was another eccentricity. His strong point was being able to take any character without knowing a line of his part. He was quite contented with learning the “business” and making up the rest. One night at Gosport, while representing Byron in Southern's tragedy of *Isabella*, he reached the point where he should have said in his death agonies :

“ Oh Villeroy ! let a dying wretch entreat you  
To take this letter to my father.”

What Thornton actually said is not recorded, but it was certainly not these words, for having disposed himself to die with effect he was snatched back to life by Villeroy hurriedly whispering : “ Mr. Thornton, the letter—the letter.” Thornton had forgotten all about the epistle which unravels the plot, but he was equal to the occasion. Calmly rising to his feet he took the letter from his bosom and said, “ One thing I had forgot through the multiplicity of business. Give this letter to my father ; it will explain all ” ; and once more surrendered himself into the arms of death.

O'Neill, the father of Miss O'Neill, cannot be omitted from this list of eccentric managers. If any

of his company disappointed him O'Neill had but one speech—"Confusion burst his skull, a black-guard! What will I do? Here, give me my great-coat and I'll double his part with my own." The great-coat was his universal panacea, whatever the general costume of the play might be. If the Ghost in *Hamlet* complained to him of the lack of armour, the manager would shrug his shoulders and after a pause exclaim: "Oh bother! sure if ye'll put on a great-coat ye'll do very well." It is said that a knot of novices once joined O'Neill, and, having played some time without receiving their pay, took proceedings against him. He checkmated them by a counterclaim for money due to him for spoiling all the plays they appeared in! They at once dropped their suit. It is not unworthy of remark that three of the most distinguished tragic actresses who ever appeared on the English stage—Mrs. Siddons, Miss Brunton, and Miss O'Neill—were daughters of theatrical managers; and of these, two—Roger Kemble and O'Neill—ran a strolling company.

Stanton, in whose company Harriot now found herself, resembled Manly in that he was a man of ideas. He was also possessed of considerable energy. Holcroft, the dramatist, who was in his company, says: "I have seen him, after printing his own bills, taking money at the door of the theatre; shortly after that he appeared in the character of Sir George Airy, and between the acts took the lead in the orchestra; in the farce he acted as Hob in *Hob in the Well*, and at intervals was actively employed as scene-shifter, lamp-dresser and prompter." Unlike Manly, Stanton had no prejudice against his own profession, and two of his daughters attained good positions on the London boards—one of them, Mrs. Goodall, was very popular. His eldest son became a scene-painter and showed more than average ability. We take it that he was the John Stanton, of whom Donaldson speaks, who was manager of Stockport Theatre some thirty years afterwards.

Holcroft has a good deal to say about Stanton, whose company he joined some fifteen years before Harriot's time, after leaving that of Roger Kemble. He had no high opinion either of him or his methods. "This patriarchal manager," writes the editor of Holcroft's *Memoirs*, "with his wife, sons, and daughters, seems to have been not only an object of envy, but from his blunders and stupidity the butt of the whole company." Among other instances which are related of his talent for absurdity, he wished to have Shylock played in the dialect of Duke's Place and was positive Shakespeare intended it so. He once told the Duke in *Othello* a messenger was arrived from the *gallows* instead of the *galleys*, and in playing the part of Bardolph, where that worthy person, descanting on the fieriness of his nose, says, "Behold these meteors, these exhalations," he used to lift his hands to heaven with a solemn flourish as if he had really seen "the heavens on fire."

According to Holcroft there was a good deal of dissatisfaction in his company. Thanks to the system which allows a manager to rank his children as performers whether they acted or not (and at this time Stanton's offspring must have been very young), "Stanton swept eleven shares out of the twenty available (four being *dead* shares representing payment for dresses, scenery, etc.) or nearly half the profits, into his pocket every night." This was "a constant subject of discontent to the rest of the actors, who are all to a man disaffected to the higher powers. They are, however, most of them in debt to the manager, and of course, chained to his galley; a circumstance which he does not fail to remind them of whenever they are refractory." But in spite of bickerings, strikes were unknown, and no doubt the reason is found in Holcroft's description of strolling players as "a set of merry, thoughtless beings who laugh in the midst of poverty and never want a quotation or a story to recruit their spirits. When they get any money they seem in haste to spend it

lest some tyrant in the shape of a dun should snatch it from them."

Harriot's association with the Stantons was an advantage to her in more ways than one. She had a chance of seeing better acting than she had had under Bibby. Mrs. Davenport, afterwards for thirty-six years a respected actress at Covent Garden, was in Stanton's company ; Harriot was taken notice of by Stanton's family, and her education, which hitherto had been a thing of shreds and patches, was pursued seriously. She also made the acquaintance during her four years at Stafford of well-to-do people, which, considering that the profession was looked at askance in the country, says much for her manners and demeanour. A practical piece of advice says that the next thing to having money yourself is to go where money is, and this advice, whether by accident or intention, the girl had the wisdom to follow. The family of a banker named Wright at Stafford petted the "player girl," and we read that the daughters of the banker "took a delight in dressing her for the characters she played, contributing gowns, gloves, and shoes and the use of their jewellery. She had a general invitation to their hospitable house for all the nights when she did not perform, and as the principal families of Stafford visited there three nights at least in each week she had the advantage of being in their society."

Mrs. Baron-Wilson quotes the words of "a very estimable patroness at Stafford" as evidence of the girl's social popularity at this time. "She was very handsome," we are told, "very lively, highly amusing, and perfectly ladylike, though not what is termed accomplished ; she sang pleasantly and was an admirable dancer." Another authority of a humbler grade who was professionally connected with the Stantons is also cited. From the latter we learn that "Miss Mellon was a great favourite among the principal families and with all the young people of both sexes. . . . The mother was a gay, pretty woman,

but very rough with her daughter occasionally. . . . They were in straitened circumstances because her stepfather was disposed to drinking and low company. Miss Mellon's situation between the two, who disagreed exceedingly, was greatly pitied; so that even among the poorer classes (especially the shoemakers with whom Stafford abounds) she was an excessive favourite and greatly respected. . . .

"Miss Mellon and Mrs. Nunn, a daughter of Mr. Stanton, were the best actresses we ever had in Stafford. She could show a little temper sometimes at the theatre and was uncommonly particular about her dresses. She had her own way very much with the manager and was made much of by him, as well as by his eldest son, who was said to be attached to her. . . . She lived entirely with the leading ladies until she left for London, her home being so uncomfortable she had no peace there."

Harriot continued to make friends among the gentlefolk, and her intimacy with the Wrights of Stafford increased. Then in October 1794 came her chance. Her lucky star ordained that Sheridan should be appointed one of the Stewards of Stafford Races, and down came the great manager from Drury Lane to have a few days' respite from the cares and responsibilities of getting his big theatre in Drury Lane in working order, the old house having been pulled down and the new one opened on March 12, 1794.

But Sheridan was not to get away entirely from the smell of the lamps. It was etiquette for the race stewards to bespeak a play, and they suggested *The Belle's Stratagem* and *The Romp*, which Mr. Stanton produced, with Harriot Mellon as Letitia Hardy and Priscilla Tomboy. The house was crammed with the gentry and racing visitors, and Sheridan, all smiles and amiability, was good enough to express himself greatly pleased with Harriot's acting. He probably did not care one way or the other, but Mr. Wright,

the banker, took him seriously, and at once suggested that he should engage her for Drury Lane. The worthy gentleman did not know that engagements for the principal theatre in London were not made in so easy a fashion, and Sheridan's answer that he "would think of it and it should be done when he went back to town," was not regarded as mere politeness.

However, to make sure, some other friends of Harriot's, the Misses Williamson, daughters of the Chairman of Quarter Sessions, eager to further her interests, invited Sheridan to tea to meet the young aspirant, and the manager, in his affable way, confirming his promise, the thing was looked upon as good as settled. Michael Kelly, it may be remarked in passing, says that the introduction to Sheridan was effected by a Mr. Horton, an intimate electioneering friend of the dramatist. The point, however, is of no very great importance.

Possibly Sheridan never gave another thought to the matter, and when the end of the year came and nothing was heard from him, Harriot's hopes fell, and she entreated her good friend Mr. Wright to remind the erratic manager of his promise. For a wonder Sheridan replied, but bound himself to nothing, remarking that "it was scarcely worth while for a lady of Miss Mellon's talent to appear towards the close of a season which the manager intended should be a short one; but when they were about to reopen the house he trusted to hear again from her"; and with this diplomatic answer Harriot and her friends were forced to be content. She could do nothing but wait; during the spring of 1795 she continued with Stanton's company, and when the season at Drury Lane opened in May the pertinacious banker again wrote to Sheridan.

The reply to any one who had not had experience of Sheridan's facility for promising anything and doing nothing, seemed encouraging enough. Virtually it was a prospect of an engagement in September

provided Harriot's talents realised the manager's expectations. On the strength of this Mrs. Entwistle, who most likely was the moving spirit in the campaign, and who already saw her daughter a "star" in London, determined to make the plunge, and the two arrived in the metropolis in June, full of hopes.

## CHAPTER IV

Sheridan's broken promise—Mrs. Entwistle's cottage in St. George's Fields—Harriot's tact towards Sheridan—The opening of the new Drury Lane—“Orders” for the play—Sheridan's lavishness—Eccentricity of the Duke of Queensberry—The eighteenth-century gallery and its occupants—Lax morality of the theatre.

WAITING on a rich man's favour was a trifle compared with waiting for the fulfilment of Sheridan's promises. Harriot called upon the wayward genius and was fortunate enough to find him at home, albeit he was in a slovenly dressing-gown, was unshorn, and betraying in his sallow face the previous night's occupation. He looked anything but the handsome man of fashion whom she had seen in Stafford, and whom she had with the enthusiastic admiration of a young girl regarded as little less than a god.

The disillusion was bad enough, but worse was to come. Sheridan had completely forgotten her name, who she was, and where she had come from ! Luckily Harriot had with her his last letter to Mr. Wright and she confronted him with this. The manager was not in the least taken aback. How could he be ? the airy, alert spirit who with his charming and persuasive manners could soften the hardest hearted creditor and wriggle out of any difficulty. He overwhelmed his embarrassed and expectant visitor with compliments, very pleasing to hear, but which she must have seen were quite superficial ; and put her off with the vague assurance that he would “keep her in his mind.”

Harriot returned home in tears, and Mrs. Entwistle went into one of her impromptu passions, and protested that the girl ought to have “made”

Sheridan give her an engagement. Not convinced by Harriot's arguments that such a thing was impossible the energetic lady resolved to try her hand at cornering the wily manager. She came back utterly discomfited, exclaiming angrily: "I saw he was telling me lies all the time, yet I could not catch him out with a direct one."

Mrs. Baron-Wilson finds fault with Sheridan. "Instead of stating at once the unwelcome truth," she says, "that there was no vacancy for another actress at Drury Lane, he kept these poor people in uncertainty during three months by his unmeaning promises; thus preventing them from returning to the country or from accepting engagements in minor companies." Harriot's biographer evidently had not the least idea how theatrical managers are pestered by applicants all eager for engagements, for which the majority have not the slightest qualification. As a matter of fact Harriot was again lucky in being induced to wait her chance, for had she gone back to the country in all probability she would never more have been heard of, save, perhaps, as being an actress of average ability; and most certainly she would not have died a duchess.

Feeling sure that Harriot would obtain a post in the Drury Lane company, Mrs. Entwistle had taken lodgings near the Strand so as to be within an easy walk of the theatre, but when this post seemed as far off as ever she found a cheap cottage in New Street, Southwark, in St. George's Fields, a dreary waste on the fringe of which to the north was the Surrey Theatre. The theatre was then called the Royal Circus, having been built for burlettas and equestrian entertainments, the Licensing Act being an effectual bar to the production of the "legitimate" drama. Beyond the western border was Astley's, the performance in which took place in the open air with a pent roof house to protect the audience from rain. The great attraction of St. George's Fields was the Dog and Duck gardens. There were other gardens,

but none of them were in such repute—or disrepute—as those of the Dog and Duck. Here the riff-raff and scum of the metropolis congregated to drink and smoke and to revel in the brutalities of duck-hunting, varied by the occasional excitement of a dog-fight or the baiting of a bull, the last amusement, however, a thing of the past when Harriot and her mother removed to New Street. Surrounding the Dog and Duck were patches of uneven ground and hillocks interspersed with ponds, where snipe in the winter could be found and sometimes shot by cockney sportsmen.

Harriot was now seventeen (Mrs. Baron-Wilson's estimate), a fine-grown young woman, inclined to be buxom ; with a brilliant complexion and dark eyes, which could laugh with good humour or blaze into anger, just as might be necessary. Unlike the majority of the actresses of her day Harriot does not seem to have been disposed towards flirtation. She had but little sentiment and much common sense ; also she had an eye to the main chance, in other words she was prudent. We are told that “the young men used to look under her bonnet with unrestrained expressions of impatient admiration,” and this one can readily believe. The costume of 1795 was very much the mode on which that of 1914 is based—the hat, or bonnet, as it was called, enshrining the face in coquettish depths. Hoops and the monstrous structures of hair, built up with the assistance of paste and grease, had gone out of favour, thanks to the influence of prim Queen Charlotte, and women's dress had become quite natural. The fact that at this time Harriot had to wear mourning, owing to the death of Mr. Entwistle's brother, probably enhanced her beauty by very contrast.

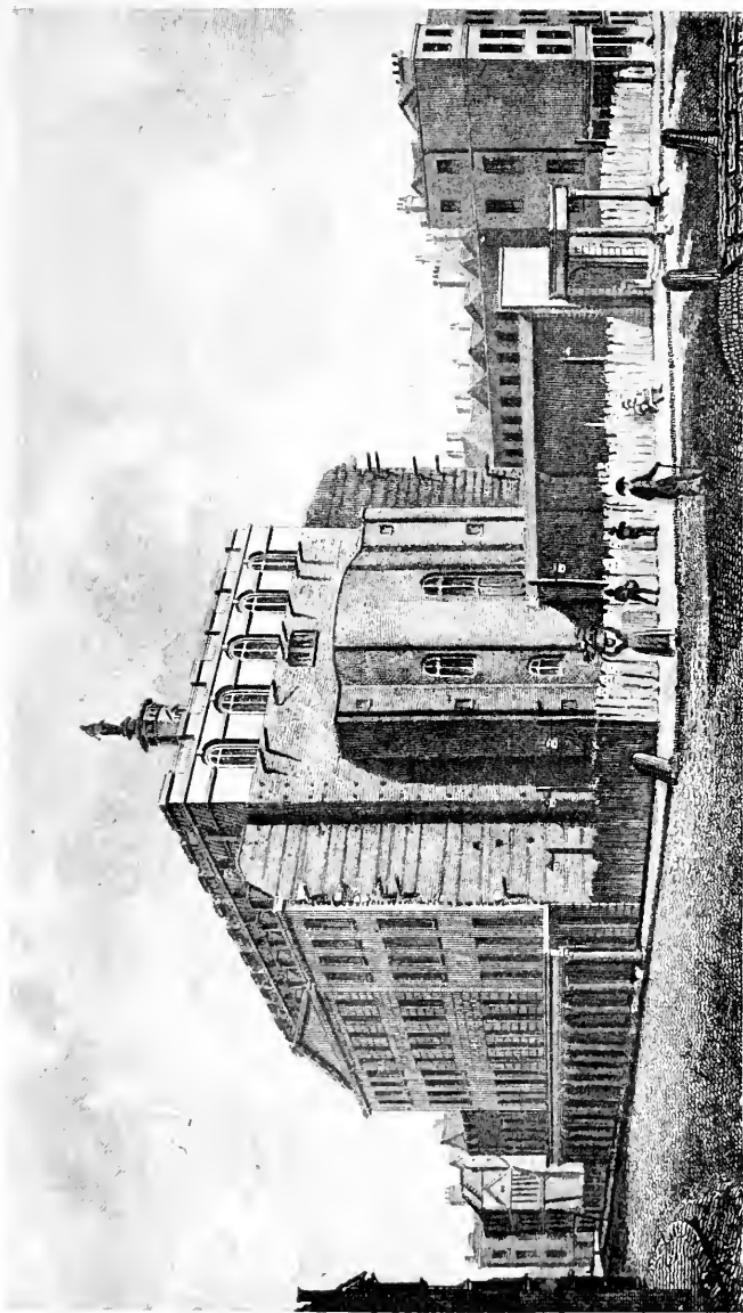
The summer faded, but Sheridan was silent and Drury Lane seemed as far off as ever. The little stock of money was dwindling, and in despair she appealed once more to her faithful friend Mr. Wright, the Stafford banker, who, with the energy of the

business man, wrote somewhat strongly to Sheridan, representing the position Miss Mellon was placed in through relying on his promises, and the result was a letter from the manager asking her to call on him.

At her second visit Sheridan received her with his usual affability and asked her to read the scenes of Lydia Languish and Mrs. Malaprop from his own play of *The Rivals*. Harriot's answer could not have been bettered by the cleverest woman in the world, yet she was prompted only by her naïveté. "I dare not, sir, for my life!" she exclaimed. "I would rather read it to all England. Suppose, sir, you did me the honour of reading it to me?" Nothing could have pleased Sheridan more, and he read nearly the whole of the play to the diplomatic young person. The interview proved a success, and Harriot returned joyously to her mother with the news that she had been admitted a member of the great Drury Lane company.

The fervid Irish imagination went to work. Harriot saw herself already a "star," and her mother had visions of enormous salaries out of which she would take an ample share. Neither suspected that, although outwardly all was splendour and prosperity with the new Drury Lane, both the management and the company were passing through an anxious time. The theatre had been planned on too ambitious a scale. It had cost £200,000; it opened in debt, and the outside in fact was never completed. Troubles, also, were brewing in the company. At one time an engagement at Drury Lane was equivalent to a sinecure, and many famous actors and actresses could be named who never played at any other London theatre. Miss Pope, for instance, was for fifty years at Drury Lane, and was not seen elsewhere save at Dublin and Liverpool.

In an odd theatrical journal called *How do You do?*, published in 1796, and apparently the work of amateur journalists, we read that "Mr. Grubb (one of the proprietors), it is said, intends to



DRURY LANE THEATRE, OPENED MARCH 12, 1794.

From an engraving by J. White, after J. Capon.



manage Drury Lane Theatre the ensuing season, and means to call in the assistance of a deputy only on extraordinary occasions. What strange changes have occurred relating to old Drury within these few years. Formerly a situation under its roof, if ever so trifling, was reckoned to cease only with life, and now a general discharge at the end of the season has become the fashion.” But this was not the only difference from the Drury of old that the company had to face. A prompt payment of salaries was not to be expected, but, notwithstanding these gathering clouds, everything appeared to augur well for the new theatre. The opening play was *Macbeth*, with the strongest cast which could be got together, and the performance was noteworthy in the fact that the bodily appearance of Banquo at the banquet was done away with, and Macbeth addressed himself to a “figment of the imagination”; but *The St. James’s Chronicle*, while approving the innovation, pointed out the inconsistency of retaining the “black spirits and white and red.” Miss Farren, then at the zenith of her fame, spoke an epilogue accompanied by “effects” altogether unique. She began :

“ The very ravages of fire we scout,  
 For we have wherewithal to put it out,  
 In ample Reservoirs and firm reliance  
 Whose streams set Conflagration at defiance.  
 Panic alone avoid ; let none begin it—  
 Should the flame spread, sit still ; there’s nothing in it,—  
 We’ll undertake to drown you all in half a minute.  
 Behold obedient to the Prompter’s bell  
 Our tide shall flow and real waters swell.  
 No river of meandering pasteboard made,  
 No gentle tinkling of a tin cascade,  
 No Brook of broad cloth shall be set in motion,  
 No ships be wrecked upon a wooden ocean ;  
 But the pure element its course shall hold,  
 Rush on the Scene and o’er our Stage be rolled.”

At this point the curtain rose, and a cascade of water rushed from tanks in the roof into a huge

basin over artificial rocks. Then the actress, pointing to the tumbling torrent, went on :

“ How like you our aquatics ?—need we fear  
Some Critic with a Hydrophobia here,  
Whose timid caution Caution’s self might tire,  
And doubts if water can extinguish fire ?  
If such there be, still let him rest secure,  
For we have made ‘ Assurance doubly sure.’  
Consume the *Scenes* your safety yet is certain.  
Presto ! for proof let down the Iron Curtain.”

Again there was a pause while an iron curtain was lowered in the proscenium, anticipating the regulations of the present day ; and to show the audience there was no deception it was banged upon by heavy hammers. Miss Farren then continued the epilogue (which we forbear from quoting further), the iron curtain meanwhile rising and disclosing the statue of Shakespeare under a mulberry-tree ! It was an ill-omened ceremonial, for fifteen years later the theatre was burned to the ground.

Sheridan was about the last man in the world to have control of money and of the business arrangements of a theatre. He extended the free list to 700 admissions which could be used night after night, and it was asked how he could expect the theatre to pay ? But the fact was that the craving for “ orders ” at this time and for many years afterwards was insatiable, and Sheridan could never say “ No.” The ivory tickets which admitted perpetually were in constant demand and were passed from hand to hand among people who could well afford to pay. Nollekens the sculptor, who was enormously rich, never went to the opera unless he had “ bones ” lent to him, and grumbled heartily at the regulation which compelled gentlemen to go in full dress with swords and bag wigs. When the King’s Theatre was burned down in 1789 the company removed to the Pantheon, and the custom of full dress was dropped while the house was being rebuilt. Nollekens welcomed this relaxation, as he was able to wear a shabby dress and worsted

stockings. Boswell, meeting him in the pit, loudly exclaimed: "Why, Nollekens, how dirty you go now! I recollect when you were the gayest dressed of any in the house." "That's more than I can say of you," retorted Nollekens. J. T. Smith, who records this, remarks that "Boswell certainly looked very badly when dressed, for as he seldom washed himself his clean ruffles served as a striking contrast to his dirty flesh."

As members of the company had the privilege of writing orders (in those days there were pit orders: Charles Lamb went with a pit order when he was taken to Drury Lane to see his first play) the number of "deadheads" among an average audience must have been very large. A letter signed "Veteran" which appeared in *The World* of November 20, 1788, gives some curious details relative to this custom as observed at Drury Lane.

"Some four years since," he writes, "the Managers complained: it is to be feared, indeed it must be allowed, that some of the performers grossly abused the privilege of writing orders which till then had been left to the discretion of performers, in regard to numbers. . . . A compromise to limit and ascertain the number of orders . . . was proposed by the then Deputy Manager, Mr. King, and readily agreed to by the performers, which was that every performer at three pounds per week and upwards on certain nights might send in orders to the amount of a night's salary. But this season comes a new regulation that *no written orders* are to be admitted; but that you are to have *ivory tickets*—no objection to *ivory tickets*, but how are they to be distributed? Why, as follows: 'Not any performers at a lower salary than six pounds per week are to have any'—so that performers who had last season three pounds per week and have made an agreement for this season at four pounds per week, instead of being enabled to oblige their friends in greater numbers, find themselves entirely deprived of that

privilege and reduced to the necessity of *begging an ivory ticket*.

“Then to persons of a higher salary than six pounds and under ten the grievance is nearly equal, for a performer at a salary of seven, eight, or nine pounds per week cannot send any greater number to the Theatre than one of six pounds per week.”

“Veteran” adds in a footnote: “The writing an order takes away in society the disagreeable weight a man with a small income feels when associating with a man in affluence, as for example having one day dined with a friend who produces Burgundy at his table and who in a few days after was to dine with me I could not help regretting that it was not in my power to give him Burgundy in return: he replied: ‘But you have sent my wife and daughter to the play, which obliges me more.’”

If we remember rightly, Charles Dickens once expressed his belief that the ruling passion in the human breast was the passion for orders for the play, and it would appear from an anecdote told by Michael Kelly of the Duke of Queensberry—Old Q.—that the passion for the giving of orders may be equally strong. Kelly writes: “After coffee had been handed round the Duke used to ask ‘Who is going to the Italian Opera to-night? I long to use my family privilege.’” This privilege, he asserted, was that of writing admissions for the theatres. On one occasion nine persons went to the opera with his written admissions. Of course such a privilege impressed his guests with a sense of power, but the secret was that the Duke had an arrangement with the various theatres that his written admissions should be honoured and paid for afterwards.

One feature of the eighteenth-century theatre has, happily, long since disappeared. The upper gallery gods—and goddesses—were always sources of anxiety to the management, and of discomfort and annoyance to the rest of the audience. In the days of Colley Cibber the unruly footmen and their lady companions

monopolised the gallery and did pretty much as they liked. Managers, after his time, put down the turbulent nuisance so far as the men were concerned, but the ladies held on to their rights and were tolerated to an extent which no doubt led the Puritanic portion of the community to shudder at the vice and immorality of the theatre. There was some reason for the complaint ; but the Puritan's mistake was in classing the profession with the least reputable of the audience. It is a little difficult to understand why the presence of frailty was not only endured but encouraged, but so it was, and though at this distance of time one can look upon the fact as characteristic of the period and without being much disturbed, it was very much the reverse during the whole of the eighteenth century, and indeed far into the nineteenth.

The complaints of the unruly behaviour of audiences at those periods form very curious reading to-day. The pit-ites could be noisy and even violent, but they seem to have confined themselves to the stern business of criticism and to their self-imposed duty of preserving theatrical traditions. The gallery and the boxes divided laxity of manners between them with great impartiality, the only difference being that, while the occupants of the first were annoyances to the more decent part of the audience, those of the second interfered with the actors and actresses.

Holcroft makes this entry in his diary under June 28, 1798 : "Our theatres at present—and from its smallness this theatre (*i.e.* the Little Theatre in the Haymarket) in particular—are half filled with prostitutes and their paramours : they disturb the rest of the audience ; and the author and common sense are the sport of their caprice and profligacy." Remonstrances were evidently useless, and a few years later we have a correspondent of *The Theatrical Inquisitor* (Vol. I) complaining that "sometimes they (the gallery-ites) amuse themselves with talking to each

other across the theatre ; sometimes they scamper up the stairs and through the different lobbies, and always in some way or another contrive to annoy the respectable part of the audience."

What the upper gallery was like the same writer, in his effort to suggest a remedy, tells us : " The evil as far as the gallery people are concerned can never be remedied till they are placed in a situation where they can see and be seen. Placed in a secret corner of the house where, from their awkward situation, they have only a partial enjoyment of what is passing on the stage they are led to seek for their own amusement, and the hunting down a poor outcast woman is much about the same sort of pleasure to them as a boy finds in persecuting a cat." But in respect to the comfort and convenience of the public theatrical architects were completely indifferent. The entrance to the pit of the Haymarket was by the descent of a flight of stairs, and when the rush was great, injuries were of common occurrence. On the occasion of the visit of King George and Queen Charlotte in 1794 the crowding and fighting were so terrible that fifteen persons were killed either through suffocation or from being trampled upon.

Fashion and wealth, the patrons of the boxes, certainly did not set an example of propriety. It would almost seem as though the " bucks " and " bloods " when " flushed with insolence and wine," considered their rudeness to be one of the traditional theatrical rights. Without going back to the days of *The Beggar's Opera*, when the nobility had seats on the stage, instances of boisterous vulgarity on the part of the *ton* abound. In the month when Harriot Mellon was admitted a member of the Drury Lane company *The Times* takes notice of a " short riot in the front boxes " at Covent Garden Theatre " which commenced with an insolent young man incommoding a lady." The " short riot " was terminated by the " short process of knocking him down and literally tossing him out." In the same issue a Drury

Lane actor was sharply reprimanded and told to remember that "the front rows in conspicuous boxes are belonging to the public" and that "no performer whatever" should "whisk from behind the scenes to mix with the audience and disturb their entertainment by talking loud and long with women of the town."

There is a smack of the old contempt for the "profession" in the above, for it is very certain that the habitués of the boxes did very much as they pleased so long as the feelings of the virtuous pit were not outraged. In *The Satirist* (Vol. IV) a correspondent writes that he "took a box in the most conspicuous and, as I thought, the most eligible situation of the opera house and did imagine from the immense price I paid to have been protected from any description of nuisance. Judge then, sir, my astonishment at finding last Saturday night that the very next box to mine was occupied by a notorious woman whose noisy and indecent conversation continually interrupted the attention and shocked the ears of my family. . . . Mr. Taylor at the commencement of the preceding season published a bill intimating that 'Ladies of a description more easily understood than expressed' should not even be suffered to enter the *pitt* of this theatre. . . . It seems from what I witnessed that he only meant to exclude them from the 'pitt' that they might find protectors who would liberally obtain them places in the boxes in the lower circle of which I beheld a few nights back"; and the indignant correspondent proceeds to name a few of the "Anonymas" of the period, suggesting, in spite of his prudishness, that he was pretty well posted up in the frivolities of the town.

As late as 1836 we find the author (James Grant, afterwards editor of *The Morning Advertiser*) of *The Great Metropolis*, when writing of Drury Lane Theatre, describing the second and third tiers of boxes above the dress-circle as parts of the theatre "patronised by those nymphs of the *pavé* who are able to pay

for admission, which is understood to be much more moderate to them than to the public generally." Similar privileges to similar ladies were granted in the early days of Promenade Concerts, and indeed up to the seventies—doubtless in the interest of the refreshment contractor. Macready probably did as much as any manager to abolish this equivocal "free list," and in his diary under January 5, 1842, he writes: "Received a letter from the Editor of *John Bull* wishing to know from me if 'the women of the town' were really admitted or altogether excluded as he supposed them to be." Macready waxed indignant at the insinuation that the practice was still permitted.

The morality of the stage has always been a stock subject for the purist to discuss and condemn, and it must be owned there was plenty of material. At the same time grossly exaggerated ideas were afloat. Frederick Reynolds probably correctly gauged the general opinion when he wrote: "The young men of the period to which I now allude (the end of the eighteenth century), when supping at the Bedford, Shakespeare, or any other tavern in the vicinity of the theatres, conceiving that an actress had more professions than one, would often order the waiter to step to Covent Garden or Drury Lane for such and such a celebrated actress."

The newspapers were not too refined in their innuendoes where the stage was concerned, and any piece of scandal in which an actress figured was at once seized and descanted upon with great gusto. The stories of George Anne Bellamy, Sophia Baddely, and Becky Wells were taken as types of the life of the average lady of the stage, and when a biography was attempted of an actress who was not notorious in any way the biographer was very careful to lay great stress upon her unblemished reputation as of a thing rather the exception than the rule.

When Harriot commenced her career at Drury Lane the topic both in the green-room and out of it



MRS. INCHBALD.  
From a contemporary print.



was the scandal of Mrs. Bland, Mrs. Jordan's sister-in-law, and Mr. Caulfield. The *liaison* of Mrs. Jordan and the Duke of Clarence was a never-failing dish of gossip, and the indiscretion of John Kemble, the austere and dignified, towards Miss De Camp, and his published apology, had not been forgotten; and into this curious world of laxity and easy morals—Mrs. Siddons termed the Drury Lane stage a “sink of iniquity,” but something must be allowed for the great Sarah’s cold temperament—Harriot was plunged.

## CHAPTER V

Harriot Mellon's first appearance as Lydia Languish not a success—Mrs. Jordan's consummate art—What Harriot learned from her—Eighteenth-century audiences and their stickling for their rights—Emery's "bull"—Mrs. Siddons's innovation as Lady Macbeth—*The Devil to Pay*, a perennial farco—Retirement in 1796 of some old actors—Bensley, Parsons, Dodd, Moody.

FOR some time Harriot did little more than attend rehearsals and watch the acting, her mother taking care to be present, and in this respect following the example of Mrs. Farren, who, until her daughter became Countess of Derby, rarely allowed her ewe lamb to be out of her sight. The Drury Lane season opened in 1795 on September 16, and Harriot, singing in the chorus of the National Anthem, had her first sight of the interior, which, lighted as it was only by smoky oil lamps, must have seemed to her a vista of illimitable space. On October 30 she fluttered her wings as Lydia Languish, but owing to nervousness she did not create much impression. Probably the influence of her "tomboy" parts lingered in her memory, and Lydia Languish does not come within this "line" of character. The critics, however, were kind, and one wrote: "Her appearance was strikingly handsome, her voice musical, her action powerful when not checked by fear, and there were some tones of archness at times which practice may increase; so it would be unfair to call last night a failure though she did not succeed."

Verily her face was her fortune; had she been plain or uninteresting her fate would have been sealed. After her trial effort it was considered prudent to keep her to insignificant parts, and at a bound she descended from Lydia Languish to one of the "cap-

tives" in John Kemble's melodramatic romance *Lodoiska*. She was in good company, however, for another captive was Miss De Camp. *Lodoiska* has long been consigned to the theatrical lumber-room, and all that now survives is the refrain of one of the songs :

"I give thee all—I can no more,  
Though poor the offering be."

Presently she had a chance in the plays with which she was familiar—Maria in *The Spoiled Child*, Lucy in *The Country Girl*, Miss La Blond in *The Romp*, and Lucy in *The Devil to Pay*.

In all those parts she had very little to do, but as in every one she was on the stage at the same time as Mrs. Jordan, who played Little Pickle, Peggy, Priscilla Tomboy, and Nell—characters with which the popular Dorothea was identified and which she had made her own—the girl had the enormous advantage of studying minutely the methods of a consummate mistress of comedy. Beneath Mrs. Jordan's wonderful naturalness there was infinite art. Macready says of her: "With a spirit of fun that would have out-laughed Puck himself there was a discrimination, an identity with her character, an artistic arrangement of the scene, that made all appear spontaneous and accidental, though elaborated with the greatest care. Her voice was one of the most melodious I ever heard, which she could vary by certain bass tones that would have disturbed the gravity of a hermit; and who that once heard that laugh of hers could ever forget it? . . . At rehearsal I remarked, as I watched this charming actress intently through her first scene, how minute and how particular her directions were; nor would she be satisfied till by repetition she had seen the business executed exactly to her wish. The moving picture, the very life of the scene, was perfect in her mind, and she transferred it in all its earnestness to any movement on the stage."

The amazing popularity of these four plays is a tribute to individuality and also is evidence of the wonderful pertinacity of eighteenth-century play-goers. Certain pieces they were never tired of seeing, and they must have known by heart not only the catch phrases but pretty well the lines of whole plays. They asserted their rights to have everything said which they had been accustomed to hear, and strongly resented innovations and abridgments. When the farce *Of Age To-morrow* was produced at Drury Lane to open the season of 1805, and Miss De Camp made her entry immediately after the drawing up of the curtain, the applause with which she was greeted was interrupted by a loud cry from the galleries for the prologue. Miss De Camp and Bannister in vain attempted to proceed. The clamour increased, and, fearing a tumult, Bannister appealed to the audience. "Ladies and gentlemen," said he plaintively, "the prologue to this piece has not been spoken for a considerable time back. Formerly I had the honour of speaking it, but it is now so long since I have repeated it that really I do not remember one word of it and, therefore, hope that your goodness will excuse me." This restored tranquillity and the farce was allowed to go on.

Instances of stickling for tradition abound, and a more ludicrous example could hardly be cited than that which is given in Edwin's *Memoirs*. *Pizarro* was on one occasion produced by Kemble at Covent Garden, and on account of the indisposition of G. F. Cooke, Barrymore from Drury Lane performed the part of Pizarro. At the beginning of the fourth act an attempt was made to omit the conversation between Rolla and the Sentinel at the prison gate. This was loudly opposed, and the dialogue was lost in the uproar for some minutes. Kemble then came forward and stated that Mr. Emery, who was to have played the Sentinel, was unaccountably missing when he should have been upon the stage. This explana-

tion did not prove satisfactory, and Kemble was advancing to apologise a second time when Emery appeared *in propria persona* and, addressing himself to the audience, said : “ Ladies and gentlemen,—upon my honour I am truly sorry to appear before you in a manner apparently culpable, *but my wife has lately been in that state to which most men who are married are liable.*” This involuntary bull, proceeding from the agitation of poor Emery’s feelings, was received with a burst of laughter, amid which the agitated comedian proceeded further to involve himself. “ It is indeed a *family business,*” he protested, and, finding his explanation had satisfied and tickled the exacting audience, he retired. He had not, however, reached the end of his “ roasting.” On his reappearance as the Sentinel he was very warmly applauded, but Rolla’s question to him, “ Have you any children ? ” and his answer, “ Yes, I have,” sent the house into convulsions.

As in the case of Emery, audiences were quick to forgive when they saw an actor was not to blame. Oxberry tells of a ludicrous scene which incidentally illustrates the difficulties limited appliances of lighting placed in the way of actors and audiences. In the year 1784 at Drury Lane the opera of *The Lord of the Manor* was substituted for the play which had been announced. Miss Farren was ill and Mr. John Palmer could not be found. Miss Collett read for the former and Mr. R. Palmer for his brother. The play at that time had not been published and they were obliged to use the manuscript copy, Miss Collett and Mr. Palmer each with a candle in hand, constantly handing the manuscript from one to another. Palmer came to a passage so interlined that he could not proceed. The audience, perfectly familiar with the play, hissed violently, upon which Palmer came forward and asked one of the audience to examine the manuscript. A gentleman stepped from the pit, looked at the writing, and declared that it was illegible. The audience applauded as loudly as they had hissed, and,

the book being returned, permission was graciously granted to pass over the obscure passages.

The actors and actresses were closely wedded to the parts in which they made their successes. Middle-aged actresses, mothers of families, and extremely matronly in appearance, persisted in playing Little Pickle, who of course is a girl in her early teens, and appeared to be quite unconscious of the absurdity. Even Mrs. Jordan, great artist as she was, could not relinquish some of her favourite characters long after her shape had lost the slimness and appearance of youth necessary for their adequate representation. Sheridan was greatly perturbed when he heard that Mrs. Siddons was meditating an innovation in the sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth*. Mrs. Pritchard, whom Dr. Johnson, somewhat unjustly, it is believed, termed a "vulgar idiot" who used to speak of her "gownd," always held the candle in her hand while soliloquising ; Mrs. Siddons proposed to put it down while she went through the "business" of washing out the "damned spot." Sheridan heard of this piece of audacity and waited upon the actress in her dressing-room just as she was about to leave for the stage, to know if it was true. He remonstrated, but Mrs. Siddons persisted and had her way, and the new reading was successful. But innovations themselves soon became traditions. After Mrs. Siddons had grown stout and unwieldy she tried to repeat her old triumph as Isabella. When she knelt to the Duke, imploring mercy for her brother, two attendants had to come forward to help her to rise ; and to make this appear correct the same ceremony was gone through with a young actress who performed the same part and did not need any assistance whatever !

Dramas which had caught the popular fancy were clung to in spite of newer attractions ; and the traditional "business" and the phrasing of favourite actors and actresses were handed down from old playgoers to their children, who came to regard them

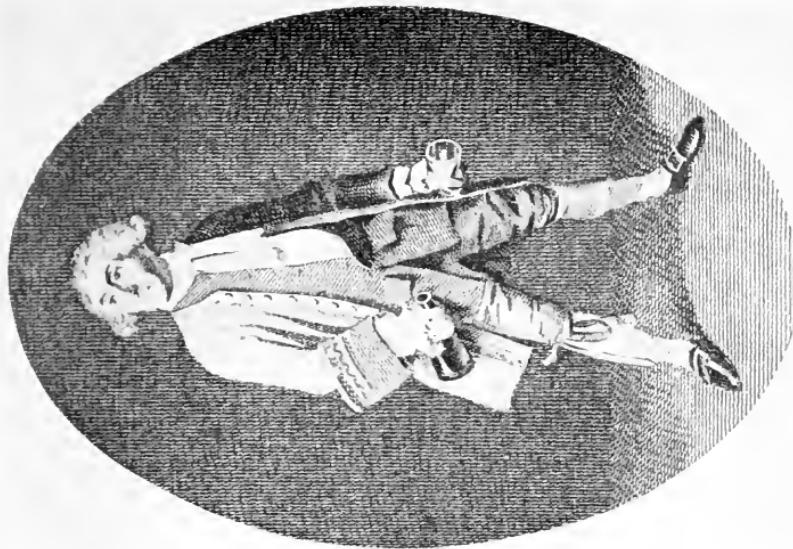
with veneration and as things which should never be altered. The humour of such pieces as *The Devil to Pay*, the most lasting and most popular of the farces of the old school (Voltaire was of opinion that it was the best farce ever written), was of a very elementary kind, and herein lay its success. Two married couples, one in low, the other in high life, are contrasted. Jobson, the drunken cobbler, rules his household and his wife Nell with the strap. Lady Loverule uses her hands on her husband and servants. A doctor with magical powers transposes the wives, and Lady Loverule discovers she has found her match in Jobson, while Nell revels in luxury. Of course in the end things are righted, but the *motive* of the play hugely pleased both the husbands and the wives in the audience, and a dramatist cannot play a surer card than this.

*The Devil to Pay* dates back to an older farce, *The Devil of a Wife*, produced in 1723, and is notable for containing the bull erroneously attributed to Sir Boyle Roche. Lady Loverule, on seeing Nell in her own fine clothes, cries: "Is not that I there in my Gowne and Petticoat I wore yesterday? How can it be when I am here? I cannot be in two places at once." "Surely no, unless thou wer't a Bird," observes Rowland, one of the lady's friends. The bull is watered down in *The Devil to Pay* to "I cannot be in two places at once," and in some roundabout fashion was fathered on to Sir Boyle Roche, who, having been born in 1743, certainly cannot claim the credit of it.

One of Harriot Mellon's experiences in those early Drury Lane days was the curious fashion in which she was shifted about and called upon to fill up any vacancy. One can hardly imagine a rising actress in these days playing Maria in *Twelfth Night*, Miss Grantham in *The Liar* a few evenings later, then Cleone in *The Distressed Mother* (which, adapted by Ambrose Phillips of "Pastoral" renown, from Racine, is one of the stilted tragedies which

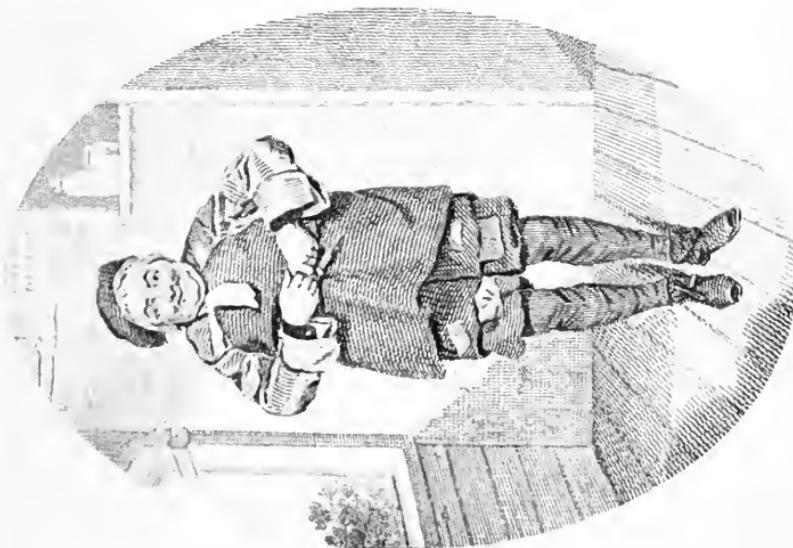
divided popularity with suggestive comedy, “gentel” or sentimental comedy, and boisterous farces, throughout the eighteenth century), Amanthis in *The Child of Nature*, Berinthia in *The Trip to Scarborough* among other parts, and then suddenly descending to sing in the choruses of *Mahmoud* (the opera in whieh Braham first appeared at Drury Lane). The truth seems to be that Harriot’s good nature, her willingness and her desire to please, led the management to regard her as a sort of “general utility.” But luck attended her all the same. It was surely fortunate that she had to play Berinthia in lieu of Miss Farren, who had been suddenly taken ill, and Amanthis for the same reason instead of Mrs. Jordan. Cleone must have been completely out of her range. Having seen Mrs. Jordan in the part of Amanthis she did very well in this.

When Harriot entered upon her career at Drury Lane very few of the old school of actors with the studied gestures and slow mouthing declamation, favoured by Quin and Mossop, remained. The aneient method of stamping before making one’s appearance, crossing the stage at every opportunity, protruding the elbow, slapping the thigh, pointing the toe, and all the rest of the old absurdities, were things of the past, but some of the older tragedians had not shaken themselves free from the rusty fetters of tradition. The French actors appear to have been far less stilted and conventional. Anthony Pasquin, who, for all his servility and mercenary baseness, was a keen observer, writes in his biography of Edwin the comedian: “Of all the actors I have seen in different countries the actors of Britain seem to possess the least knowledge of what may be produced by the regulation of the arms—to move the arms gracefully should not be the last or least part of a gentleman’s education, and I the more insist upon this, as awkwardness has more influence upon those members than any other. I do not know that the French rules for social motion were ever engraved,



PARSONS AS DUMAS IN "THE NATURAL SON,"

From an engraving by Thorntwaite, after De Wilde.



DODD AS ABEL DRUGGER IN "THE ALCHEMIST,"

From an engraving by Thorntwaite, after De Wilde.



but if they have been I am certain that to copy them would be highly conducive to the improvement of our stage personages."

Dr. "Sir" J. Hill was of the same opinion and points out that "Their powerful comedian at this time has . . . less action than any of the English players. He will stand in his place upon the stage with his arms genteelly disposed and without once stirring hand or foot go through a scene of the greatest variety. He will in this single posture express to his audience all the changes of passion that can affect an human heart, and he will express them strongly: so that tossing about of the arms and strutting from side to side of the stage is not the business. The great secret of crossing and crossing is an English art; and if our players would a little more attend to the excellencies of their neighbours they would improve by letting alone this as well as many others of their supposed excellencies. It has the appearance of an odd lesson to bid the English players observe the French in order to moderate their action; but the man was not quite in the wrong who had his daughter taught to dance that she might learn how to stand still."

Garrick did much to introduce nature into the art of the stage; then a slight reaction seems to have set in, and "dignity" was regarded as the one essential. Kemble was, of course, at the head of this school, and the blank-verse tragedies—*The Grecian Daughter*, *The Roman Father*, *The Carmelite*, *Zenobia*, and many more drearinesses—gave "dignity" full scope.

William Bensley, who was the Malvolio when Harriot played Maria in *Twelfth Night*, somewhat suggested the old tragedians, but more by nature and force of circumstances than from intention. In other respects he was a man who thought for himself. Like "Gentleman" Smith, Bensley was of good family and a scholar. He had been in the Army and had never shaken himself free from the effects

of the drill-sergeant. His gait was stiff and uncouth ; his voice croaked, and he had a nasal intonation. In Malvolio, Boaden thought him perfection. " His stage walk," says this theatrical biographer, " entirely reminded you of the one, two, three of his dancing-master. This scientific progress of legs in yellow stockings, most villainously cross gartered, with a horrible laugh of ugly conceit to top the whole, rendered him Shakespeare's Malvolio at all points."

The traditional rendering of Malvolio was to make him a subject of ridicule, whereas the moderns (adopting the view of Charles Lamb) are inclined to regard him as a man of considerable sense whose merits were not appreciated by Olivia's frivolous, rollicking *entourage*. Lamb had a high opinion of Bensley's Malvolio, " which he performed with a richness and dignity of which (to judge from some recent castings of that character) the very tradition must be worn out from the stage." On May 6, 1796, some six months after Harriot entered the company, Bensley made his last appearance when he played Evander in Arthur Murphy's *The Grecian Daughter*, and Harriot played Penelope in *The Romp*, which was given as an after-piece.

The old comedians were, of course, less iron-bound. A comedian succeeds as much through his natural peculiarities as through his knowledge of stagecraft, and Parsons, Dodd, and Moody, all of whom retired in 1795-6, had personal characteristics with which audiences had long been familiar and in which they delighted. To take oneself out of the play and address an audience confidentially is a very ancient method with the comedian to win popular favour, and Parsons on one occasion excelled in this illegitimate form of the acting art, though as a rule he adhered to the author's text. When the play *The Surrender of Calais* was performed before George III at the Haymarket in 1791, Parsons represented the chief workman at the gallows erected for the patriots who were to be hanged by the decree of

Edward III, and instead of saying the words set down for him, "So the King is coming; an the King not like my scaffold I am no true man," substituted to fit the occasion, "An the King were here and did not admire my scaffold I would say 'D——n it, he has no taste.'" The audience roared, and the King joined in the laughter.

Parsons was the original Sir Fretful Plagiary in *The Critic*, and was equally successful in Crabtree in *The School for Scandal*. John Taylor speaks of him as excellent in clowns, drunken men, and old coxcombs. If what *The Morning Chronicle* said of him when performing in *The Citizen* with Miss Farren be true, his voice must have been harsh in the extreme. "Whenever Parsons acts," we read, "the ladies in the stage boxes are really to be pitied, he croaks so vociferously that scarce one in ten of them escapes the headache; indeed, this is Parsons's great defect who otherwise is an excellent comedian."

Dodd appears to have been a comedian who worked up the character he personated with the most elaborate care. Miss Pope said that no one took a pinch of snuff like Dodd. Mrs. Charles Mathews, who called him "the high, red-heeled stage dandy of the old school of comedy," draws a graphic picture of "his rotund person, which was ably supported upon two short, though well-formed legs, always elegantly covered with silk stockings, and his feet with Spanish leather shoes secured by costly buckles—his hair *bien poudré*, the queue of which was folded curiously into a sort of knoeker which fell below the collar of ofttimes a scarlet coat; the little man in short was a decided fop of his day both on and off the stage." "What an Aguecheek the stage lost in him!" exclaimed Lamb in his delightful essay "On some of the Old Actors." Boaden was of opinion that he over-elaborated, remarking that "he always bestowed the whole of his author upon his audience"; but this was a quality which appealed to Lamb. "In expressing slowness of apprehension this actor sur-

passed all others. You could see the first dawn of an idea stealing slowly over his countenance, climbing up little by little with a powerful process till it cleared up at last to the fulness of a twilight conception—its highest meridian."

But there would seem to be some justice in Boaden's criticism if it be true that about twelve o'clock one night Dodd began to tell how he took a journey to Bath and at six o'clock in the morning he had got no farther than Devizes. The company began to dwindle away in spite of Dodd entreating them not to go. "Stay and hear it out," he cried, "and upon my soul I'll make it entertaining." But even this prospect did not avail and he was left soliloquising. Taylor speaks of his living with an actress (unnamed) "who came forward in youth with talents and accomplishments, but whose profligate conduct at last wholly deprived her of public fame." When Miss Mellon played Lucy in *The Recruiting Officer* on January 2, 1796, Dodd was Brazen. Dodd's last appearance on the stage was on June 13 of the same year, when he was Kecksy in *The Irish Widow*. One of the finest passages in the essay quoted above is the description of Lamb meeting him in the gardens of Gray's Inn shortly before his death—also in 1796.

Neither Dodd nor Parsons appears to have shown much diminution of his powers at the time of his retirement, but it seems to have been otherwise with Moody, judging by the dry remark of Genest that "John Moody was not engaged after this season—it was high time for him to retire, as latterly he grew very heavy in his acting." Genest did not overstate the case, Taylor saying that "he grew at last so negligent in his acting that his Major Oldfox (*The Plain Dealer*) was a mass of torpid languor, and when he appeared as one of the witches in *Macbeth* his boots were plainly seen under her petticoats." Moody possessed a solemn woodenness of expression which must have been highly effective in certain characters. Mrs. Mathews speaks of "the immovable features

of Moody, who, afraid of o'erstepping nature, sometimes stopped short of her."

After retiring from the stage, Moody set up as a market gardener at Barnes. Taylor accuses him of being mean and fond of money, but the story told, as evidence, of his lending money to Brereton the actor (whose widow became Mrs. John Kemble) and the method he adopted of getting it back hardly justifies the accusation. Moody waited patiently for repayment, and, nothing coming, the first time Moody met his debtor "he looked earnestly at him and vented a kind of noise between a sigh and a groan. He repeated this interjection whenever he met Brereton, who at length was so annoyed that he put his hand in his pocket and paid him. Moody took the money and with a gentle aspect said: 'Did I ask you for it, Billy ?'"

*The Dramatic Censor* in 1770 pronounces him the best Teague (*The Committee*) that the stage ever produced—indeed he seems to have excelled in Irish characters of a certain type. In others, such as Major O'Flaherty (*The Irish Widow*) and Sir Callaghan O'Brallagan, he was not so successful. After his last appearance at Drury Lane as MacFoggan in *Three and Deuce* in 1796 he returned to the stage in 1804 for one night, playing Jobson in *The Devil to Pay* at Covent Garden.

## CHAPTER VI

John Kemble and his alleged singular marriage—Miss Farren and her successes—The mania for wigs in 1777—The story of Colman's play *The Suicide*—Miss Farren and the “breeches part”—Mrs. Abington plays Scrub—Mrs. Siddons and her ridiculous dress as Rosalind—Harriot Mellon in “breeches parts” in Liverpool.

THE year 1796 was notable for last appearances. On May 23 Mrs. John Kemble took her leave of the stage in a play called *Celadon and Florimel* or *The Happy Counterplot*, performed for the first—and last—time. Harriot Mellon was given a small part—Philotis. The piece was an adaptation of *Marriage à la Mode* or *The Comical Lovers* produced in 1707, which in its turn was simply a combination of the comic scenes of Dryden's *Marriage à la Mode* and *Secret Love* arranged by Cibber. Miss Farren played Melantha, Mrs. Bracegirdle's part in the old play. Mrs. Kemble before her marriage was Miss Priscilla Hopkins, who was one of the four actresses (Miss Farren, Miss Walpole, and Mrs. Robinson (Perdita) being the other three), not one of them twenty years old, playing principal parts at Drury Lane in 1777.

Kemble was not a philanderer despite the De Camp episode, but he seems to have inspired more than one lady with the tender passion. To this Harriot Mellon may be called as a witness. Fanny Kemble tells the story. “Mrs. Inchbald and Miss Mellon,” she says, “were sitting by the fireplace in the green-room, waiting to be called upon the stage. The two were laughingly discussing their male friends and acquaintances from the matrimonial point of view. John Kemble, who was standing near, at length jestingly said to Mrs. Inchbald, who had been

comically energetic in her declaration of whom she could or would or never could or would have married, 'Well, Mrs. Inchbald, would you have had me?' 'Dear heart,' said the stammering beauty, turning her sweet, sunny face up to him, 'I'd have j-j-j-jumped at you.' There is reason to believe that Kemble also had an affection for Mrs. Inchbald, but in an honourable sense. The story told of the circumstances under which he married Mrs. Brereton would not, however, redound to his credit if they were well founded.

Among Kemble's alleged conquests was a daughter of Lord North. His lordship apparently had as great a horror of a matrimonial alliance between a lady of blue blood and an actor as had Lord Ilchester and Horace Walpole, and promised Mrs. Brereton a handsome sum of money by way of dowry if she married Kemble. Mrs. Brereton consented; she became Mrs. Kemble, but—Lord North kept his money in his pocket! This is the version given in *The Dictionary of National Biography* on the authority of Oxberry, who, however, was not the originator, and does an injustice to Mrs. Kemble, as it makes it appear that it was she who was approached by Lord North.

According to the source of the story, the *Memoirs* of Kemble by John Ambrose Williams (1817) repeated in *The Theatrical Magazine* (March 1823) and by Oxberry in 1825, this was not so. The arrangement was made with Kemble, who, at an interview with Lord North, was promised £4,000 if he would take to himself a wife within a fortnight, the money to be paid at a fixed time after the marriage. "In due course," we read, "Mr. Kemble waited on his lordship to claim the performance of his promise. His lordship received him with great politeness and congratulated him on his nuptials, but when he proceeded to remind his lordship of the occasion of his visit relative to the expected dowry he was rebutted in a strain of the most galling and severe irony—a talent

in which his lordship was not deficient. . . . His lordship's conduct was certainly dishonourable, not to say base; he, however, entrapped Mr. Kemble into the possession of a good wife, a blessing for which the latter gentleman was always thankful." The story is hardly credible. Kemble bluntly called it "a lie," and we may leave it at that.

Harriot Mellon could hardly have been more fortunate in the models from whom she learned so much, for besides Mrs. Jordan there was Miss Farren, Miss De Camp (afterwards Mrs. Charles Kemble), Mrs. Goodall (the daughter of Harriot's old manager, Stanton), Mrs. Bland, Miss Pope, Mrs. Crouch, and Miss Heard, the latter an accomplished comedy actress.

Miss Farren, of course, heads the list. She had been before the London public nineteen years, making her first appearance in the metropolis at the Hay-market Theatre as Miss Hardeastle in 1777. It is unnecessary to dwell upon Miss Farren's grace, elegance, and refinement. One could fill pages with the encomiums of contemporary critics and with those of subsequent writers who, perhaps, only saw her once, or not at all; and that she was the ideal Lady Teazle, Lady Townley, Lady Paragon, Millamant, Emmaline, Lady Fanciful, and a host of similar characters portraying more or less the fashionable lady of the times, may at once be accepted. Nor is the fact to be disputed that she was the only rival to Mrs. Abington. Undoubtedly Miss Farren was one of the queens of English comedy.

After her success in 1777 her re-appearance in 1778 was looked forward to with great interest, and curiosity was considerably whetted when it was rumoured that the promising young actress would appear in a new piece in a "breeches part." In the meantime—probably to remind playgoers of the fact that she had made her *début* as Miss Hardeastle—Colman announced *She Stoops to Conquer* for July 1, and a new farce by O'Keefe, *Tony Lumpkin in Town*



FANNY KEMBLE.  
From an engraving by Maddocks, after Wagsman.



or *The Dilettante*, for the following evening, and, by way of a lift to the novelty of the farce, *The Morning Chronicle* inserted this friendly paragraph : “ The Manager of the Haymarket has shrewdly announced the comedy of *She Stoops to Conquer* for representation this evening. Those who mean to go to-morrow night to see the new farce of *Tony Lumpkin in Town* or *The Dilettante* and have not seen Dr. Goldsmith’s comedy on the same subject will do well to attend and trace the beginning before they pursue the end. Such as have seen the comedy and mean to see the farce will doubtless carry with them hearty stomachs for fun, and while the sickly *petits maîtres* of the boxes are exhibiting their affectation and drawing out *damn’d low*, will feel like Englishmen and give the preference to true humour when produced in opposition to Gallic refinement.”

Of *Tony Lumpkin* we are told that “ The farce has certainly a great deal of rubbish in it, but it may fairly be said that it has some fun, and once allowing for the *lowness* of the humour every critic must confess that it has some shade of merit.” Of plot, however, it certainly had nothing. The motive which supplied the sub-title *The Dilettante* was the passion for collecting pictures. *Tony Lumpkin* (played by Parsons), a buffoon given to practical joking, employs a painter to decorate the collector’s portraits with huge white wigs. There would appear to be in this some intention of satirising the eighteenth-century craze for wigs, and, *apropos*, Genest quotes the Rev. William Granger as writing in his *Biographical History* that “ the extravagant fondness of some men for periwigs is scarcely credible—I have heard of a country gentleman who employed a painter to place periwigs upon the heads of several of Vandyke’s portraits.”

O’Keefe was fresh from Dublin when he wrote *Tony Lumpkin*, and in 1777 the rage for wigs and monstrous head-dresses was at its height in the Irish capital. *The Gazetteer* of June 9 published an extract

of a letter from Dublin in which we are told that “The folly and absurdity of the present extravagant fashion is now carried to the greatest excess here. Our ladies, not content with appearing in public with an immoderate quantity of hair, wool, and gauze (which serve to make a pyramid of near three feet from the forehead), have adopted the method of rearing cornflowers, fruit, etc., on the lofty pinnacle. . . . It is to be hoped that the crops which may be produced by this new and unheard-of cultivation may in time prove a staple commodity to the kingdom and bring revenues to the Crown.”

The French Revolution set its heel on the fashion, which was finally stamped out by the hair-powder tax in 1796. The official advertisement in the papers announcing the imposition reads to-day very curiously. The wearers of wigs are informed where they may obtain certificates on payment of a guinea “and no more is to be demanded of any person upon taking out a certificate for using hair-powder upon any pretence whatever; nevertheless, where there are more than two unmarried daughters in a family, in each case a double certificate stamped with two stamps of one pound one shilling each is required to be taken out.” Why such stress should have been laid on two unmarried daughters, for the words are printed in capitals, it is hard to understand.

A wig was the cause of healing a slight quarrel between Mrs. Jordan and Miss Pope. “Mrs. Jordan, who was on the sunny side of forty, and Miss Pope, who was considerably in its shadow,” says Fanny Kemble, “both wore brown wigs without a shade of difference between them. Some slight green-room misunderstanding brought about a coolness between the charming actresses, and on one occasion they were listening to one of Bannister’s humourous stories which sent Miss Pope into a fit of laughter, and, jerking her head back, her wig slipped off and disclosed a round poll without a solitary hair upon it. Before the room, however, was aware of the mishap Mrs.

Jordan, forgetting her grievance, cried out, 'My dear-r Miss Pope,' and threw herself so skilfully in front of the old lady that the latter was able to replace her headgear, and so relieved was she that in return for her enemy's kindness she threw her arms round her rescuer's neck with a kiss and a grateful 'God bless you!'"

On the other hand, according to John Taylor, the non-wearing of a wig once served Mrs. Inchbald in good stead. When Thomas Harris was the chief proprietor of Covent Garden Theatre Mrs. Inchbald called upon him at his house in Knightsbridge to consult him about one of her plays. Harris, who was a handsome man and believed himself to be invincible, made furious love to the lady, who in her alarm seized him by the hair and made her escape. Rushing to the theatre she entered the green-room "with so wild an air and with such evident emotion that all present were alarmed. She hastily related what had happened so far as her impediment (Mrs. Inchbald had a stutter which, however, disappeared when she was acting) would permit her and concluded by exclaiming, 'Oh! if he had wo-wo-worn a wig I had been ru-ruined!'"

Ladies wore wigs during the first years of the nineteenth century, that is to say, ladies on the saady side of thirty. The Hon. Amelia Murray in her *Recollections* tells how the Princesses had their heads shaved and wore wigs ready dressed and ornamented for the evening to save time in the toilet. The freak of fashion found its culmination in the shaving of heads of widows. Miss Murray records her remembrance of her mother's beautiful hair being cut off for deep mourning, nor was it ever allowed to grow again, a wig being substituted.

Miss Farren's acting as Miss Hardeastle, on the evening before the performance of *Tony Lumpkin*, received complimentary notices, and on the 11th was produced Colman's *Suicide*, the new piece with a breeches part which had set the town gossiping.

It was performed nineteen times during the season, and eighteen years after was revived at Drury Lane, but not for Miss Farren. She was still in the company, her retirement not taking place until the following year, but nothing would induce her to put on male garb after her one and only essay, excepting, of course, as Rosalind. In the revival the character of Nancy Lovell, in which she was the subject of so much embarrassing criticism in 1777, was taken by Mrs. Goodall, Harriot Mellon playing the part of Peggy. Peggy probably was a "chambermaid," but there is no means of knowing, as the play was never printed, which is somewhat of a pity, as to a great extent it mirrored the times in satirical fashion.

"*The Suicide*," we learn from *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, "is filled with allusions to temporary subjects, the damnation of Mr. Kenrick's play by tailors, Macklin's Verdict in the Court of King's Bench, Dr. Price's Political Pamphlets, and Dr. Priestley's Philosophical Writings."

Kenrick was, of course, the vilifier of Dr. Johnson and Goldsmith; and his disgraceful libel on Miss Horneck, Goldsmith's "Jessamy Bride," was the cause of his publisher Evans having the honour of a thrashing at the hands of the indignant poet. It is not very clear what was the play which was "damned" by tailors. There was certainly a play extant called *The Tailors*, ascribed to Foote but disclaimed by him, but it does not seem to have been played in 1778, nor has Kenrick's name ever been associated with it. It may be noted as a curious coincidence that when some five-and-twenty years later the piece was revived at the Haymarket, the London tailors assembled in full force—the journeymen in the gallery and the masters in the pit—and not only heartily damned it, but attempted to wreck the theatre, and the military had to be called in to quell the riot.

Dr. Price was the distinguished Nonconformist divine of Hackney Gravel Pit Chapel, whose broad-mindedness on the subjects of the American War

and French Revolution brought down upon him the attacks of political partisans, Edmund Burke among the number. Dr. Price was well versed in political economy, and, says one of his biographers, "When Mr. Pitt determined to introduce a bill into Parliament for liquidating the national debt he applied to Dr. Price for his opinion and advice, and received from him three separate plans ; one of which was adopted by that minister, though without the slightest acknowledgment of his obligation, and now forms the foundation of that act for reducing the national debt which was established by the legislature in 1786, and contributed more than any other measure to raise the credit of his administration." Dr. Price, two years before the production of *The Suicide*, was presented by the Corporation of London with the freedom of the city in a gold box.

Dr. Priestley, it need hardly be said, was the philosopher whose researches did so much to further the progress of chemical science, and who in 1778 was looked upon with great suspicion by the ignorant and narrow-minded in consequence of his religious—or non-religious, as his opponents would put it—views. Fourteen years later a bigoted mob broke into his house in Birmingham, burned his library, smashed his apparatus, and destroyed the labour of years.

"Macklin's Verdict" was that given in the suit the sturdy, pugnacious actor brought against certain riotous persons who considered stage traditions were flouted because the tragedian was guilty of a reprehensible innovation by playing Macbeth in a Scottish costume, instead of wearing the time-honoured scarlet and gold tunie and putting on a wig, all of which, as Garrick had thus attired himself, was considered correct ! Incongruous as the scarlet tunic and the wig would appear in our eyes, Macklin's appearance was not less incongruous in the eyes of an eighteenth-century audience. The actor's figure did not suggest that of a warrior, and when a clumsy old man, who looked more like a Scotch piper than a chieftain and

a princee of the blood, stumped down the stage at the head of his army everybody was naturally moved to laughter. The result of the outery was the discharge of Macklin from the Covent Garden company ; whereupon he brought his action and gained the day, the rioters having to pay his costs, to take £100 worth of tickets for his benefit, the same amount for the benefit of his daughter, and hand over £100 compensation to the management.

These allusions were in themselves sufficient to make the play talked about, but there were others even more piquant. One of the characters—Catchpenny by name—is made to say that for an author of very little ability to obtain success on the stage is an easy matter, that a jealous woman falling into a fit has saved one play, calling a family out of bed was the salvation of another, and the throwing down of a screen procured reputation to a third. Of course it was part of the joke that Colman was author of *The Jealous Wife* and *The Clandestine Marriage*, two of the plays referred to, and softened what malice there might be in the shaft directed at Sheridan.

*The Suicide*, despite its lugubrious title, appears to have been written with considerable vivacity. The plot tells how Tobin, a young mercer, having dissipated his fortune with the assistance of Ranter, Catchpenny, and other rakes who have lived at his expense, determines to commit suicide. His sweet-heart, Nancy Lovell, seeing how he is likely to end, disguises herself as a man, and becomes one of his associates, as Dick Rattle. With the assistance of a physician, Rattle devises a scheme to foil the contemplated suicide. Meanwhile Tobin's intention is noised abroad and the undertaker comes to solicit the funeral arrangements. Though the man is not dead the undertaker insists that his services must soon be wanted, as the doctor and the apothecary have been to the would-be suicide's lodgings. The undertaker recommends his scarves and gloves, and extols the dignity of pompous funerals, remarking that he

lately buried a cheesemonger in Thames Street where they were obliged to take down the sign to put up the hatchment. When the moment for suicide comes Tobin debates whether it is better to pistol himself, hang, or drown. Nancy (who in her character of Rattle has to fight a duel) advises against all these methods, recommends poison, and undertakes to provide the dose. Of course what she administers is perfectly harmless, and so all ends happily.

Some of the critics were much exercised at such a serious subject as suicide being treated frivolously and solemnly rebuked Colman for his levity. Others took a different view. *The Morning Chronicle* of July 21 informed its readers that "Those who feel themselves satirised in the new comedy of *The Suicide* are, if report may be credited, whetting their revengeful knives in order to cut up the author the first opportunity, and each man in his way. The patriots threaten a riot in return for the mention of Dr. Price's pamphlet with contempt. The duellists have met and sworn bloodily to stab the author in the back. The tavern keepers are determined to keep an extraordinary quantity of arsenic ready prepared to impregnate the madeira with which they may have occasion to serve up to the little satirist, and a certain experimental philosopher is busy in preparing leaden pellets formed from the pewter pots he has lately melted down in order to shoot them at Mr. C. from his monthly popgun."

All this added to the gaiety of the town, but it may be doubted if it were not vastly more interested in discussing the important point whether or not Miss Farren should wear breeches. And one thing is very certain to-day, that all the satire in *The Suicide* is forgotten and that which now remains of the play is the controversy which raged round the garment in question. Miss Farren's biographers agree in saying that the young lady vowed that never again would she perform in a "breeches part," but we are not told if she herself decided that she did not look

well in male attire or if the unpleasant fact was made known to her by the unfavourable comments in the press. Public opinion in those days was somewhat erratic in regard to "breeches parts." Dublin audiences and critics had tolerated and even approved the audacious Anne Catley as Captain Macheath. Peg Woffington as Sir Harry Wildair had delighted London, but apparently the thin and elegant Miss Farren was not to be thought of in masculine garb.

It must be confessed that the costume of 1778—knee-breeches, silk stockings, high-heeled shoes, and buckles—was not calculated to show off slim calves, and nature unfortunately had not been too liberal to Miss Farren in this direction. Otherwise her slender form, one would have thought, would not have been a disadvantage, but it would seem that the standard of perfection in breeches parts was fixed by the shape of the lower limbs.

Maybe Miss Farren was not unconscious of her limitations ; anyway it is clear she did not seem comfortable in the strange habiliments, and probably had not the dash to disguise her embarrassment—a shortcoming not to be wondered at considering that she was not turned twenty. *The Morning Chronicle* insinuated that she was "ashamed of appearing in breeches," adding, to soften the accusation, that "if she knew how much it served to heighten the effect of her figure when she resumes the petticoat she would be more at ease in *Dick Rattle*." After seeing her a second time the same critic thought that she "was much more at her ease," but that she did not kick Bounce with the proper spirit.

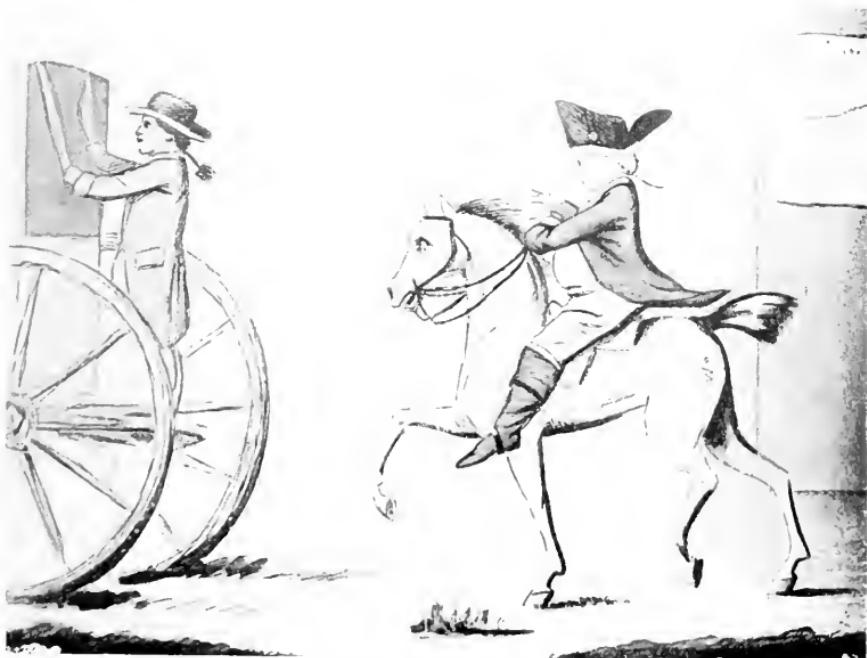
*The Morning Post* was more severe, and protecting itself from the possible consequences of adverse criticism, adopted the safeguard of putting its objections in the form of a letter from a correspondent signing himself "Dramaticus." The writer, after speaking well of the comedy, went on to say : "There is but one female of any consequence, and that one could not have fallen into worse hands than Miss



### THE PLATONIC LOVERS.

*Between these two ladies and the Queen there is no love, but a mutual esteem and a desire to please.*

LORD DERBY AND MRS. AND MISS FARREN AT DRURY LANE.  
From a contemporary caricature.



LORD DERBY IN PURSUIT OF MISS FARREN.  
From a contemporary caricature.



Farren's. Is it the manager's partiality to this lady (which by the bye is I am informed most notorious) or her own vanity that has induced her to appear in breeches ? Miss Farren is a fine figure in petticoats, but surely the worst in breeches that ever attempted the stage. By an affected modesty, for it is surely affectation, she entirely destroys the effect of one of the most laughable scenes in the whole comedy—I mean the duel scene." The sneer as to "the manager's partiality" is almost worthy of Anthony Pasquin.

Pasquin himself writing, nineteen years later, his so-called biography of Miss Farren, published soon after the marriage of the actress, made full use of the criticisms passed on the lady's figure and did not forget to add embellishments of his own. Fox had been credited with a passion for the popular comedy actress, but nothing was definitely known, probably because there was nothing to know. Pasquin, however, was ready with an explanation why the politician's ardour cooled. When Fox saw Miss Farren in *The Suicide*, the imaginative and not too squeamish biographer records, he exclaimed, "D——n it, she has no prominence either before or behind—all in a straight line from head to foot ; and for her legs they are shaped like a sugar loaf," and he gave up the pursuit for ever.

Elizabeth Farren was certainly, in the matter of the lower extremities, not so richly endowed as Dorothea Jordan, who was declared by Tate Wilkinson to possess "one of the best legs in the kingdom." Wilkinson probably did not exaggerate. Mrs. Anne Seymour Damer, to whom Horace Walpole bequeathed Strawberry Hill, and equally clever as an amateur actress and as a sculptress, made a cast of Mrs. Jordan's leg, and at Mrs. Damer's death the Duke of Clarence desired to have this specimen of her work. Whether his Grace became the possessor or not, Mrs. Damer's biographer does not tell us. Anyway, no one had a better right to have it.

Most women, connected with the stage or not, have a lurking desire to see how they look in man's

attire. In the theatre the opportunity frequently presents itself, and rarely is the chance missed. Mrs. Abington could not resist the temptation—possibly because she was conscious that her figure was more symmetrical than that of her young rival—and she chose to play Scrub in *The Beaux' Stratagem* on the occasion of her benefit at Covent Garden on February 10, 1786. Genest says that she did it for a wager, adding that “she is supposed to have disgraced herself in Scrub and to have acted the part with her hair dressed for Lady Racket” in *Three Hours after Marriage*, which followed. Mrs. Charles Mathews, writing in the prim, prudish days of 1844, was moved to say that “Mrs. Abington in the latter portion of her dramatic life was tempted to throw aside feminine grace and delicacy so far as to exhibit herself” as Scrub. Peter Pindar had also something adverse to say on the all-absorbing question, but what a satirist says is not evidence. It is his vocation to satirise, and all is fish that comes to his net. He wrote :

“ The comely Abington’s untoward star  
Wanted her reputation much to mar,  
And sink the lady to the washing tub—  
So whispered ‘Mistress Abington, play Scrub’ ;  
To folly full as great some imp may hug her,  
And bid her sink in Filch and Abel Drugger.”

Mrs. Mathews was evidently prejudiced against the actress, for she rounded off her opinion of Mrs. Abington’s Scrub with the superfluous remark that it was “a character which it may be said she acted but too well.” What was meant by this sarcasm is hard to say, unless it was an allusion to Mrs. Abington’s obscure origin (she is said to have been a cook-maid, among other humble occupations), though what this had to do with her acting as Scrub one cannot understand.

Contemporary criticism does not support Genest, Peter Pindar, or Mrs. Mathews. *The Morning*

*Chronicle*, on account of the pressure of Parliamentary matters, was unable to send a representative, but it "understood" that the "admirable actress afforded one of the most brilliant audiences that ever filled a theatre abundant entertainment by a mode of playing the part at once novel, whimsical, and laughable." *The Morning Herald* observed enthusiastically that "her entree was honoured by repeated plaudits of considerable duration. She was at length enabled to proceed, and we are happy to say that the fullest expectations we entertained were gratified in every sense. . . . Mrs. Abington, in no instance that we observed during the play, gave room for censure on the scope of departing from *chaste* acting, which is surely the highest proof of merit. . . . Mrs. Abington's figure became the metamorphose; it possessed symmetry and form in a perfect degree, and she was dressed in a style to produce a ludicrous effect."

*The Public Advertiser* was not less laudatory, remarking that "Great and versatile as we know Mrs. Abington's powers to be, previous to the drawing up of the curtain we paused on the novelty of the attempt—but her very first appearance dissipated our fears, and her progressive performance of the part showed that she was in this, as upon all other occasions, *equal to herself*." *The General Advertiser* echoed the general opinion. "She chose," it observed, "a strange part for a woman to perform, the part of Scrub in *The Beaux' Stratagem*, which she certainly pourtrayed in several parts most excellently." It is very clear that neither the part nor the costume gave any offence, and it must be admitted that whatever suggestive sprightliness Farquhar put into his sparkling comedy very little comes from the lips of Scrub.

Sarah Siddons shares with Eliza Farren and Frances Abington the distinction of being the talk of the town by her experiment in a "breeches part," and it is no exaggeration to say that her efforts in

the cause of propriety resulted in woful failure. The ultra modest mistress of tragedy had an extraordinary notion that she could by her dress indicate that she was a man and a woman at the same time. She tried to carry out this absurd compromise when she played Rosalind at Covent Garden on February 10, 1785. One of her biographers, Mrs. Kennard, has a letter in her possession which Mrs. Siddons wrote to Hamilton, a well-known artist of the day, in which she asks him "if he would be so good as to make her a slight sketch for a boy's dress to conceal the person as much as possible." Whether the dress she wore was the result of the artist's attempt to carry out the idea of an actual Epicoene one is unable to say, but it is certain that it excited great amusement and that the critics were moved to write on the subject with considerable severity.

*The Morning Chronicle* the next day said: "Her dress was highly improper. She, perhaps, thought it fanciful, but the truth is the effect was fantastical and absurd. . . . Hereafter, therefore, in the name of common sense let Mrs. Siddons throw aside her woman's hat and silken petticoats when she plays Rosalind." The critic of *The General Advertiser* "felt himself much disappointed. Instead of the gay, sprightly Rosalind who puts on a swashing, mannish outside, her garments smelt more of Persian and her whole deportment of the grave Saturnine east."

We get a glimpse of what the dress was like from *The Morning Chronicle* and *The Morning Herald* of later dates. The first described it as "most absurdly perverse. Why swathe her body in an incongruous petticoat from the elbow to the middle of the shank? Why wear a Tavistock Street frippery female hat with the swashing martial boots of some of Vandyek's portraits, or the stage dress of Falstaff? If it was prudery that led into this absurdity it was preposterous—because, why want such disguises more than heretofore in the days of the Silent Woman, Portia, nay the breeches of Prince Hamlet himself?" *The*

*Herald* pointed out that "The dress of Mrs. Siddons was demi-feminine, demi-masculine, and therefore we may properly call it the *habit neuter*. She appeared in half a petticoat and half a pair of breeches that seemed to disagree like an ill-matched man and wife." Not an inappropriate comparison.

*The General Advertiser*, with a shrewd guess at the real objection which Mrs. Siddons had to wearing the obnoxious garments, but with want of gallantry, bluntly pointed out an anatomical drawback. "Her figure," it remarks, "is totally unfit to appear out of petticoats, the knees being so evidently in contact with each other as to catch the spectator's eye in a moment and raise an exclamation of 'Why does the woman so expose herself ?' After Mrs. Wells (better known as Becky Wells) in boys' clothes Mrs. Siddons should not have come forward, because the comparison is instantly made to her very great disadvantage." Here we have it in plain language—the incomparable actress who could move an audience to tears and send people into hysterics (was not Crabb Robinson on one occasion carried out of the theatre screaming and laughing in temporary dementia ?) was knock-kneed !

But in her early days when she played comedy parts Mrs. Siddons could not have been so squeamish. At Cheltenham she was once Widow Brady in *The Irish Widow*, and, having no masculine dress for the scene where the Widow changes her sex, a gentleman, according to Mrs. Kennard, "politely left his box," provided her with the necessary garment or garments, and stood in the side wings with a petticoat over his shoulders until his property was returned to him." Mrs. Kennard stimulates curiosity concerning the interchange without satisfying it. Like Sterne in *The Case of Delicacy* she leaves to the reader to devise how it was done.

It would seem that the disfavour shown by Miss Farren and Mrs. Siddons towards male habiliments arose not so much from excess of modesty as from

a consciousness of personal defects ; surely a justifiable argument, as it is quite certain no critic—either male or female—would bestow much mercy on shortcomings arising from such a cause. Was it due to some doubt on the question of symmetry that led Harriot Mellon to be chary of appearing in “ breeches parts ” ? Her long experience of comedy must have brought many such opportunities in her way, but Mrs. Charles Mathews declared that “ she never donned the doublet and the hose, although her figure could not have been objectionable . . . but her appearance was more engaging in simple than in elegant costume, for her figure, when in motion, was not graceful.” There is much that is significant in the last nine words, but Mrs. Mathews is not correct in saying Harriot never donned male garments. At Liverpool, whither she went after the closing of Drury Lane at the end of the 1796 season, she played the part which brought so much worry to Miss Farren—Nancy Lovell in *The Suicide*—in addition to Rosalind, and the Page in *The Follies of a Day*, Holcroft’s version of Beaumarchais’ *Marriage of Figaro*.

The *penchant* of comedy actresses who could sing for playing Macheath led to very unconventional and untraditional scenes. We need not mention the topsy-turvy production of *The Beggar’s Opera* by Colman at the Haymarket in 1783 with Mrs. Kennedy as the dashing highwayman and the female characters impersonated by men. This travesty is well known, and something may be said in its favour so far as the Macheath was concerned, but there were other attempts which were simply ludicrous. Donaldson tells a story of an actor named Owenson who on the occasion of a benefit selected *The Beggar’s Opera* and personated Polly Peachum, Macheath being taken by a lady. Owenson stood six feet one and the lady was very short, and where the Captain kisses his darling Polly the “ business ” had to be reversed, and instead of the highwayman saluting Polly, Owenson as Miss Peachum lifted up the bold outlaw and gave such a

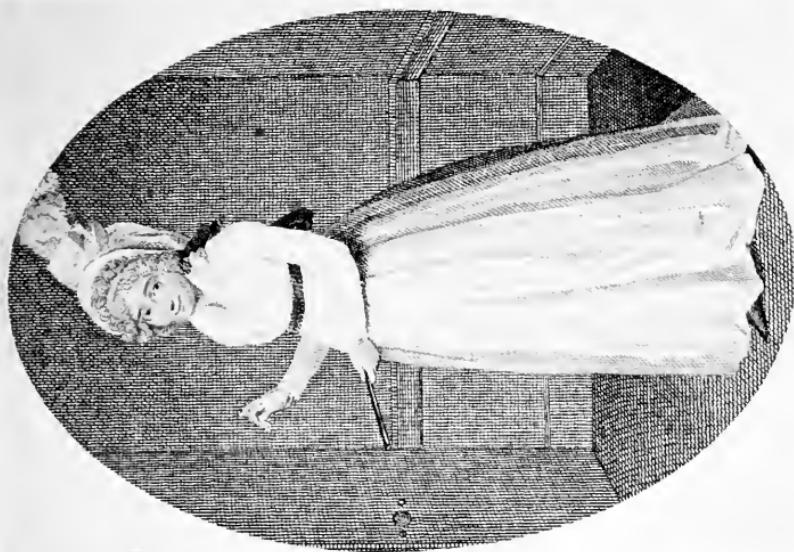
smack as made the house roar. This was burlesque, pure and simple, and so also must have been Falstaff played by the enormously fat Mrs. Webb, who, like Stephen Kemble, could play the part without stuffing. But such freaks need not be taken into account in discussing the question of "breeches parts," the qualifications for which were regarded very seriously by the eighteenth-century theatre-going public. The critic of a Bath paper expressed the general opinion on such matters when he wrote in 1805, "Mrs. Worthington, who appears at our theatre next week, is particularly celebrated for the beautiful symmetry of her person in the male attire. Indeed, her *breeches figure* is allowed to be the most perfect and admirably proportioned of any upon the English stage." After this no more need be said.

## CHAPTER VII

Colman's *Iron Chest*—Harriot Mellon has a singing part—Colman's rage at the failure of his play—He attacks John Kemble—Ireland's literary forgeries—His spurious Shakespearian tragedy *Vortigern and Rowena*—Its performance received with ridicule—Harriot Mellon witnesses it from the wings—Her engagement at Liverpool—She removes to Little Russell Street, Drury Lane—Mrs. Charles Mathews's account of Harriot's evening parties—Her appearance described.

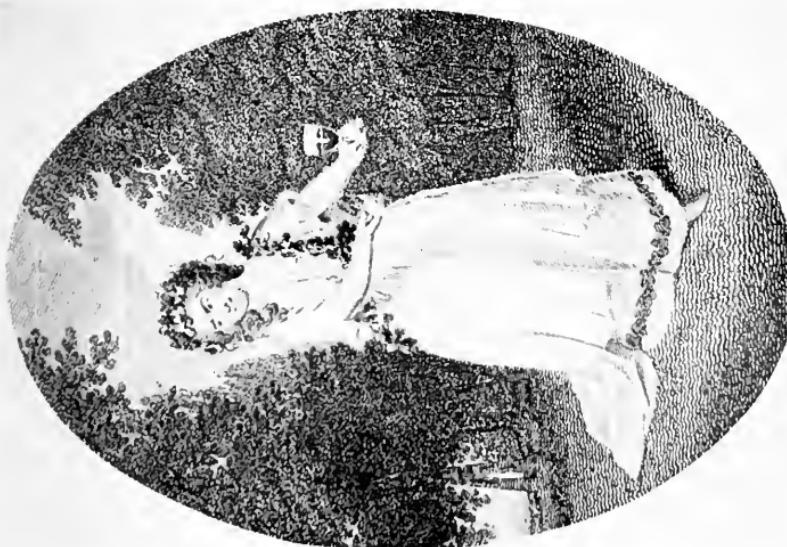
BESIDES farewell performances, other events marked the Drury Lane season of 1795–6; and of these Harriot must have retained vivid recollections. One was the production on March 12 of George Colman's odd conglomeration of tragedy, comedy, and opera, *The Iron Chest*, taken from William Godwin's powerful but sombre novel *Caleb Williams*; and another on April 2, the production of W. H. Ireland's impudent Shakespearian forgery *Vortigern and Rowena*.

Gloomy as is *Caleb Williams* in spite of its concentrated force (it is said, by the way, that Godwin wrote the last chapter first) *The Iron Chest* was even gloomier. The audience found it long and tedious, and no doubt Colman, experienced dramatist as he was, feared this effect and so introduced music, some of the best—and unhappily the last, for the gifted melodist died three days after the first night of the play—Storace ever wrote. *The Iron Chest* was a failure, and Colman threw the blame on Kemble. The play was hurriedly produced, the scenery was inadequate, and in a terribly lengthy preface to the published play Colman protested that “the most miserable mummer that ever disgraced the walls of a theatre could not have been a stronger drawback than Mr. Kemble. He was not only dull in himself, but the cause of dulness in others. Like the baleful



MRS. BLAND AS MISS NOTABLE IN "THE LADY'S  
LAST STAKE,"

From an engraving by Thorntwaite, after De Wilde.



MISS STORAGE AS EUPHROSyne IN "COMUS,"

From an engraving by Thorntwaite, after De Wilde.



upas his pestiferous influence infected all around him. . . . Poor Bannister Jun. . . . all alive himself, he was tied to a corpse which he was fated to drag about with him, scene after scene, which weighed him down and depressed his vigour. Miss Farren, too, who might animate anything but a soul of lead and a face of iron, experienced the same fate."

There was a good deal more in a similar strain. In fact Colman, who was mawkishly squeamish over other people's language (when he was dramatic censor it was said he took the oaths from the plays submitted to him to ornament his own talk), had no difficulty in finding abuse to fit the case. Not only could Colman be abusive, but, if what Rogers says be true, he could also be mean. Not content with appropriating *Caleb Williams* without permission he "had not the civility to offer Godwin a box or even to send him an order for admission. . . . Of this Godwin spoke with great bitterness."

One need not trouble to assign the precise cause of the failure of *The Iron Chest*. Colman possibly observed his usual dilatoriness in the delivery of the MS. (the last act of *John Bull*, the play which, with *The Heir at Law*, preserves his memory as a dramatist, was written in one night, Colman flinging the sheets of paper on the ground as fast as he wrote them), and this may account for the imperfect rehearsals with which he charged Kemble. Kemble undoubtedly was ill—Colman talks of finding him in his dressing-room on the night of the performance, swallowing opium pills—and Colman considered it a great grievance that an apology was not made to the audience by Kemble at the beginning of the play instead of the end. However, matters were smoothed over somehow, and Colman withdrew the edition of the play containing his attack, thereby enhancing the value of the few copies which were in circulation. This edition is now exceedingly rare.

The play was performed three times during the season. Miss Farren, according to *The Theatrical*

*Magazine*, was so disgusted with her part that she refused to perform it after the first night, and on the next representation it was read by Mrs. Powell. *The Gazetteer*, however, puts it that "Miss Farren was *really* ill." The "illness" of an actress is a very present help in time of trouble.

The title of the play gave rise to endless quips, most of them after the fashion of the time when puns were considered the highest form of wit. Apropos of a squabble between Miss Storace and Mrs. Bland, who quarrelled over the singing part of Barbara, *The Morning Chronicle* remarked that "the late fracas at the theatre has given occasion to a caricature wherein Storace is drawn in the act of lugging away Mrs. Bland with more than feminine strength, with her eyes glaring into an *iron chest* in all the agonised expectancy of curiosity and avarice." Another paragraph, containing an insinuation not wholly unfounded, runs: "Mrs. Bland complains that Madame Storace took away her character. It is pleasant to learn thus that she has got one." A day or two after one reads this further effort: "Report classes *The Iron Chest* at Drury Lane as one of the best pieces that ever was written, and there are many people who will be glad to find *there is anything in it*." Mrs. Bland is evidently again alluded to in the following: "When a certain theatrical lady was jocularly told that she wanted to get into the *iron chest* for the purpose of keeping her property clothes, it was remarked that she well knew how to preserve that, but that she wanted it to lock up her virtues, which were very apt to be displayed." There are many more gems of humour, but they may be left in repose in the yellow pages of the old newspapers in which they are chronicled. One epigram in *The Oracle* on the postscript to the preface is, however, worth quoting:

" 'Tis said by some that 'second thoughts are best';  
Reverse of this is Colman's *Iron Chest*.  
His second thoughts we find to be the *worst*,  
Though bad as bad could be we thought the *first*."

Genest sums up both play and preface thus caustically: "In a literary point of view we should have been more obliged to him if he had suppressed the play and reprinted the preface." According to *How do You do?* the journal from which we have already quoted, "The chief motive for abuse against Mr. Colman . . . is because when the theatre (The Hay-market) came into his hands he adopted a new system and sent cards of admission to several who have *since* shown they had little pretensions to the freedom of the house, but who previous to the new regulation used to walk in and out with what company they pleased. Such revenge is pitiful. The Hay-Market season is too short and the house too small to admit of many interlopers." The meaning of this is not very clear, and the paragraph may be dismissed as a journalistic conjecture.

*The Iron Chest* was played at the Haymarket later on, and it is said that John Kemble, unable to find a seat elsewhere, paid his money and went in the gallery, to see how Elliston, the representative of Sir Edward Mortimer, went through his part. Edmund Kean found the play to his taste, and it was revived by Irving, but with no great measure of success. Some of Storace's music—in which Harriot Mellon took part—became very popular, and the opening chorus "Five times by the taper's light" and the songs "A traveller stopt at a widow's gate" and "Down by the river there grows a green willow" were sung at many a concert when *The Iron Chest* itself was forgotten.

Over the second event of importance in 1796—the production of the spurious Shakespearian play *Vortigern*—literary and dramatic circles were greatly agitated. Samuel Ireland published on December 24, 1795, "certain miscellaneous papers and legal instruments attributed to Shakespeare, Queen Elizabeth, the Earl of Southampton, and others, to which were added Kynge Leare and part of Hamblette, both alleged to be printed from a copy in the handwriting

of Shakespeare. Ireland said he had received the manuscripts from his son William Henry, a youth who had found them accidentally in the chambers of a gentleman" (Genest). Dr. Parr, Pye the Poet Laureate, Boswell, Herbert Croft, and Valpy were at first persuaded the writings were genuinely Shakespearean, and, according to Taylor, Boswell "went upon his knees, kissed the imputed relies, and expressed great delight that he had lived to see such valuable documents brought to light," an attitude so thoroughly Boswellian that one is inclined to believe that the statement is true.

The elder Ireland, eager to obtain other favourable opinions, prepared a paper with this heading: "We whose names are underwritten believe these to be genuine MSS." ; and among the great scholars to whom he appealed was Porson. Porson would not say one thing or the other, and, when pressed, got out of the difficulty very cleverly by remarking, "I detest subscriptions of all kinds, but more especially to Articles of Faith."

Following up these "fragments" young Ireland brought forward a tragedy, *Vortigern and Rowena*, which he asserted was Shakespeare's; but before it was produced at Drury Lane it was made the subject of a scathing analysis by Malone, who in the judgment of most people succeeded in demonstrating its spurious character. Kemble certainly had no faith in its genuineness and showed his contempt in various ways. Only the strenuous protests of Samuel Ireland prevented him producing the play on *April 1!* Foiled in this, he hit upon the ingenious device of putting on *My Grandmother* as an after piece, so that the audience could, if they so pleased, apply the title of the farce to the tragedy. He purposely gave the comedian Dignum a subordinate part, wherein, speaking of the sounding of trumpets, he had to exclaim "*Let them bellow on!*" which words, complains W. H. Ireland in his preface to the 1832 edition of *Vortigern*, "were uttered with such a nasal and

tin-kettle twang that no muscles save those of adamant could have resisted the powerful incentive to laughter." This is rather difficult to believe unless Dignum had instructions to put on a nasal twang, for his voice naturally was a pleasant one and in singing was an excellent tenor.

Mrs. Jordan played the character of Flavia in *Vortigern*, her costume inspiring *The Gazetteer* with the jocosity that the actress, "if we may form any judgment from her dress . . . was for having the public come at the *naked* truth." Harriot Mellon had no share in the play, but, like the rest of the Drury Lane company (which was divided into two camps on the subject), took an enormous interest in it. Mrs. Baron-Wilson quotes the reminiscences of an actor (whose name she does not give) who recalls her "asking leave to be at the wings on the night of the production. Kemble was very particular in keeping them clear; but on this occasion and in her case he relaxed somewhat of his severity. Everybody was on the *qui vive* to see this alleged Shakespearian play, and though Kemble had stamped it as 'fudge' a vast number of us were of a different opinion merely for the purpose of opposing the stage manager.

"When the uproar began, the sensation behind the scenes was immense. Young Ireland, who was a dashing fellow and who had attained great favour with the little people from his affability, had quite a party on his side. The play proceeded and the riot was at its height; and this brings me to Miss Mellon. She turned pale as death, trembled like an aspen leaf, and I really expected was about to faint. As she was by no means of the fainting order I set this down to her tenderness for the young author (or finder), but I was mistaken. She had never witnessed the condemnation of a play before, and she told me afterwards that she expected from the noise that they would leap on the stage, demolish the scenery, etc., and perhaps (as they had done a little time before in Ireland) act violently towards the performers."

J. T. Smith in his *Life of Nollekens* gives an interesting account of the first night. "Samuel Ireland," he writes, "had entreated Mrs. Nollekens to persuade her husband to go the first night, and she agreed. The crowd which had assembled long before the hour of admission was enormous, and the anxiety of Ireland for the success of the play was so great that he distributed printed handbills informing the public that "A malevolent and impotent attack on the Shakespeare MSS. having appeared on the eve of the representation of the play of *Vortigern*, evidently intended to injure the interest of the proprietor of the MSS., Mr. Ireland feels it impossible within the short time that intervenes between the publishing and the representation to produce an answer to the most illiberal and unfounded assertions in Mr. Malone's inquiry. He is therefore induced to request that the play of *Vortigern* may be heard with that candour that has ever distinguished a British audience. The play is now at the press and will in a very few days be laid before the public." "The play," Smith adds, "went on pretty well until Kemble appeared, when the noise of disapprobation commenced, and being considered by the audience as an atrocious fraud it was at length completely condemned." The climax of that condemnation Smith omits to mention. It was reached when Kemble pronounced the line

" And when this solemn mockery is o'er " ;

on which a most discordant howl came from the pit, and the uproar lasted for several minutes. Kemble repeated the line, and this the Irelands contended was done maliciously. Whether or not made no difference; the play was damned, and as emphatically by the critics as by the audience. The Irelands were not to be vanquished at once, and adherents and opponents engaged in a wordy warfare equally dreary and lengthy. Chalmers, the champion of the pro-Shakespearians, plunged into a slough of argu-

ments in his *Apology for the Believers* in about six hundred pages, and afterwards flung a supplement of five hundred pages more into the battlefield. Of course there were rejoinders; other writers raised fresh issues, and these had to be replied to until, to the relief of everybody, young Ireland in 1805 confessed to the forgeries, making no attempt to blush at the deception of which he had been guilty.

The season of 1796 was over, and Harriot Mellon was established at Drury Lane. Referring to this period of her novitiate, Michael Kelly says she "proved herself a valuable acquisition to our dramatic corps. She was a handsome girl and much esteemed, and in gratitude I feel called upon to say that both as Miss Mellon and Mrs. Coutts I have received from her the most marked and friendly attentions, and am happy to have it in my power thus publicly to express my acknowledgments."

As already mentioned, Harriot had an engagement at the Liverpool Theatre, and carrying with her the experience she had gained at Drury Lane she was not only put into leading parts, but was able to give the manager useful hints as to how these parts were played by Miss Farren, Mrs. Jordan, and the rest of the London "stars." Mrs. Baron-Wilson prints a list of fifty plays in which she played during her summer engagement, involving an amount of study at which an actress of the present day would be appalled. These plays ranged from *Hamlet* to *The Spoiled Child*, and included such important characters as Sophia in *The Road to Ruin*; Rosalind; Estifania in *Rule a Wife and have a Wife*; Lady Townley in *The Belle's Stratagem*; Hero in *Much Ado about Nothing*; Maria in *The School for Scandal*; etc. In *Hamlet* she played Ophelia.

While she was at the Liverpool Theatre Mrs. Siddons fulfilled a fortnight's engagement, and the great actress recognised her as having seen her at Drury Lane, and in her stately manner introduced her to the Liverpool company as her "young friend."

With such a hall-mark Harriot at once became a person of considerable importance, and one can imagine how the company buzzed round her for the rest of her stay. On meeting Harriot at Drury Lane during the ensuing season Mrs. Siddons repeated her certificate of good conduct, “and by thus bringing her forward under such advantageous circumstances she was now in the first green-room, where her inferior salary did not entitle her to be except on such a recommendation as that of Mrs. Siddons.” But something still more important happened. “Several patrons of the drama and amateur frequenters of the green-room were present on the occasion,” and among the number was Mr. Coutts. So it may be said that to Mrs. Siddons did Harriot Mellon owe the introduction which eventually made her the richest woman in England.

The season of 1796–7 brought her into prominence, and on January 12, 1797, she played Hero in *Much Ado about Nothing*, to Miss Farren’s Beatrice, and frequently acted in Mrs. Jordan’s and Miss Farren’s characters. With her professional advancement came an improvement in other ways. Accompanied by her mother she removed to 17, Little Russell Street, exactly opposite Drury Lane Theatre, and here she lived for some years, subsequently renting the whole house. It was an enjoyable Bohemian life, and with her capacity for pleasure it is certain she made the most of it.

Mrs. Charles Mathews draws a graphic picture of a merry-making at Russell Street, some time later, when Harriot Mellon had become a favourite of the public, from materials supplied by her husband, who was one of the guests. “Before the genial and exhilarating country dance,” writes Mrs. Mathews, “gave place to the heart-repelling refinement of the quadrille (quadrilles were first danced in London in 1808) Miss Mellon’s dances were annually looked forward to with delight. . . . At the entrance of the room duly appeared the hostess, radiant with smiles



HARRIOT MELLON AS THE COMIC MUSE.

From a drawing by S. L. Stump.



and genuine hospitality, to welcome her willing guests, having then, perhaps, more happiness in her heart than when after splendour enriched and better taste adorned the scene. . . . Here with buoyant animation moved the young, handsome Sheridan Knowles. . . . There stood moodily—a looker-on—the youthful Theodore Hook in professed disdain of what he chose to term the ‘tomfoolery’ which asserted the superiority of *heels* over head. . . . Now ‘capered nimbly’ the semi-comic, fascinating Elliston; while in a corner of this narrow room leaned Mathews, not then a lame man . . . he would watch a lucky minute when the hand of his hostess was free to seize it and lead her off, to her partner’s dismay (she nothing loth), in whimsical triumph through the meanderings of ‘Money Musk’ or the excessive windings of ‘Sir Roger de Coverley’ . . . performing in his passage a ludicrous travestie of the several prominent styles he had noted. . . . These were in truth joyous days and nights, and probably remembered as such by Mrs. Coutts and the Duchess of St. Albans.”

On one occasion Harriot conceived the brilliant notion of having the floor coloured blue, and employed one of the Drury Lane scene-painters to do it. The result was that before the evening was over, the dancers discovered that they had been transformed into conventional stage demons, so far as the hue of their faces and hands was concerned, thanks to the churning up of the colour by their feet, and it took some days before the colour was completely washed out of their skins!

Little Russell Street is now known as Russell Street. Its immediate neighbourhood is altered beyond recognition. Indeed, nearly all the old landmarks of what was once the centre of literary, of dramatic, and of musical London have disappeared, and though only a few years have passed since the southern half of Drury Lane was converted into one of the ugliest streets in the metropolis one can hardly

call it to mind as it was, nor can one exactly locate its surroundings. In 1797 it was doubtless squalid in parts, but it must have been picturesque. Thomas Walker, in that characteristic production *The Original* (1836), tells us that "within memory the principal carriage approach to Old Drury Lane Theatre was through that part of Drury Lane which is now a flagged foot-passage and called Drury Court, just opposite the new church in the Strand." The "new church in the Strand" reads curiously, but apparently it was so called, although when Walker wrote it had been built 113 years. Drury Court, Windsor Court, Vinegar Yard, White Hart Yard, have passed away. The "Old Drury Lane Theatre" was, of course, Sheridan's ill-fated building.

Despite its tortuous windings and narrowness, its unsavoury courts and alleys, and the signs of decadence in Drury Lane, its neighbourhood at the end of the eighteenth century was a favourite residential quarter, especially with actors and actresses. Bow Street had not quite lost its reputation as a fashionable promenade, and in the solid houses of Henrietta Street and the still stately mansions of Great Queen Street lived many notable people. When Harriot Mellon held her merry reunions her theatrical friends had no very long distance to come. Miss Pope—

" See lively Pope advance in jig and tip,  
Corinna, Cherry, Honeycomb and Snip,"

sings Churchill in the *Rosciad*—resided for forty years in Great Queen Street on the Lincoln's Inn Fields side of the Freemasons' Tavern. James Smith of *Rejected Addresses* fame, in a delightful account of a visit to her, said that the Widow Racket in *The Belle's Stratagem* was one of Miss Pope's best parts, and "her usual manner of exhibiting piquant carelessness," we learn, "consisted in tossing her head from right to left and striking the palm of each hand with the back of its fellow, at the same moment

casting her eyes upwards with an air of nonchalance.” It is interesting to know that in James Smith’s opinion “Miss Mellon who came after her came nearest to her in this manner.” Lewis lived in Great Queen Street, and so did Knight ; the Blands were located in Bow Street ; the pugnacious Macklin had lodgings in Wych Street, and one can picture the veteran actor fighting his battles over again before a crowd of listeners, not one of whom would venture to contradict him, at his favourite house of call, “The Antelope” in White Hart Yard, where every morning he had “a pint of beer called *stout*, which was made hot and sweetened with sugar.”

Like most of the actors of his day Macklin had a strong affection for hostelries, so much so that he started a tavern and coffee-house in the Piazza, Covent Garden. He made a most ceremonious affair of his “ordinary,” bringing in the first dish himself, with a napkin over his arm. The price of the dinner was three shillings, including wine. When the repast was concluded the company adjourned to the “school of oratory” over which he presided and gave lectures in elocution.

The actor quoted by Mrs. Baron-Wilson in connection with Harriot’s fright over *Vortigern* describes her vividly as she was when she first went to live at Little Russell Street.

“Miss Mellon,” he says, “was a remarkably handsome brunette, but did not look a bit like an actress. She was much more like one of the genuine beauties of a quiet village two hundred miles from town. It was, I suppose, this rusticity that made her for a long time unnoticed. I don’t mean unnoticed merely as an actress, for with our company she was of course prepared for that, but unnoticed as a *beauty*. She had really more claim to that title than (two or three excepted) most actresses of the day. Miss Farren was then, despite the smallpox, the reigning toast ; she was an elegant woman. Mrs. Jordan was in her bloom ; she was a fascinating one.

Mrs. Goodall was delightful ; and Miss De Camp set half the young fellows mad ; nay, Mrs. Bland was voted a charmer by many ; the coarse *signora* had admirers ; to say nothing of the majestic Siddons, the Cleopatra-like Mrs. Powell, and that most graceful and lovely of all syrens, Mrs. Crouch. These ladies had each a style, you could classify them as divinities ; but Miss Mellon was merely a countryfied girl blooming in complexion, with a very tall, fine figure, raven locks, ivory teeth, a cheek like a peach, and coral lips. All she put you in mind of was a country road and a pillion ! . . . I remember her in *Lady Godiva* because I went to the front to see Bannister (Jack) playing *Peeping Tom*. The lady had very little to do, and the part is generally given to some fine-looking woman ; I presume her personal appearance was the sole ground of her selection ; there was no one in the theatre who could bring the requisite advantage and would go on for so slight a part except Miss Mellon. She was always a little inclined to *embonpoint*. I believe it was understood that she should play some of the secondary parts formerly assigned to Miss De Camp and Mrs. Gibbs. Very little was expected from her, and she rather agreeably disappointed Kemble, who had no great opinion of new comers. Miss De Camp increased in public favour so rapidly that it was deemed inexpedient to send her on for any but important parts. Miss Mellon, therefore, had many characters which, though not exceedingly prominent, were better than she had probably expected.

“ She was a good-humoured, pleasant creature in the theatre at that time, and mixed with this pleasantness a decision admirably calculated to repel any disagreeable attentions. This I remember she proved to old Dodd, who was (though a capital actor) a man of unbounded vanity and of very indifferent character, and who received two or three severe checks from Kemble for frivolities with regard to the younger actresses. Miss Mellon at once put an

end to annoyance in a prompt and spirited manner, and she spoke aloud too. Everybody was pleased except Dodd, who, I believe, never forgave her. . . .

“I recollect on the reunion of the company after the vacation . . . hearing several actors and actresses speak of having met Miss Mellon in the provinces . . . and that at York and Liverpool she became a great favourite. Our great folks spoke very highly of her indeed—Bannister, Mrs. Crouch, and others—and she was often praised for her good-natured readiness to play for any one in cases of illness, etc. On these occasions (if very sudden) the higher performers would say, ‘Miss Mellon can do it; I saw her play it very well at such a place.’ These things made her very popular with the management, for she was indefatigable, and after flaunting as the fine lady in the absence of some greater actress she returned to the secondary business she was accustomed to play with a good grace and good humour. Old Wewitzer was at this time her friend and adviser. . . . Miss Heard was a great friend of hers, so were Miss Leak, Miss De Camp, and Mrs. Jordan, who were so situated in the theatre at that time that their kindness amounted to a sort of patronage.”

This we venture to think is a fair and accurate estimate of Harriot Mellon, both as an actress and as a woman, and one can easily imagine that the will and decision which enabled her to snub Dodd developed as she grew older into that imperiousness which with a love of display rendered her vulnerable to the attacks of her enemies. It is very doubtful whether riches or rank helped her to preserve that freshness of face and form which in those delightful Little Russell Street days was so noticeable.

What Mrs. Charles Mathews has to say of her personal appearance may be taken in conjunction with the description given above, as it completes the picture. “Those who only saw the Duchess of St. Albans in her later years,” she remarks, “could have but a *soupçon* of her early attractions. . . . In person

she was tall and finely formed, but she gradually acquired a fulness which afterwards in its excess became ungraceful bulk. Her countenance had an oriental conformation—the features were small. She had dark, bright eyes, and deeply fringed lids; a delicate nose and well-shaped mouth, with white and regular teeth; clear and blushing skin (polished even to shining), and fine black hair, waving in natural curls—yet with all these appliances her countenance was unsusceptible of varied expression. A heavy frown and a sunny smile constituted all its meaning when not in repose; but a modest dropping of the eyelids from time to time while speaking had a most loveable effect upon the recipient."

Wealth and rank, we make bold to say, never afforded her the happiness of the days in Little Russell Street. Mrs. Baron-Wilson speaks of the Duchess, "to the very last anniversary of her taking possession of No. 17, making a pilgrimage on foot to this dirty, narrow street (or rather lane), where in a plain dress and without her carriage or servants she might contemplate and show to her companions the humble spot whence she had risen." And one can well believe the statement.

## CHAPTER VIII

Miss Farren's aristocratic associations—Mrs. Papendieck's story of her "arrangement" with the Earl of Derby—Jealousy between Miss Farren and Becky Wells—Allusions to Miss Farren by Horace Walpole, Samuel Rogers, Mrs. Piozzi, and the Hon. Frances Williams Wynn—Was Miss Farren's acting over-rated?—Fashionable gambling—Perdita Robinson's play of *Nobody*—Mrs Charles Mathews's opinion of Harriet Mellon as Lady Teazle.

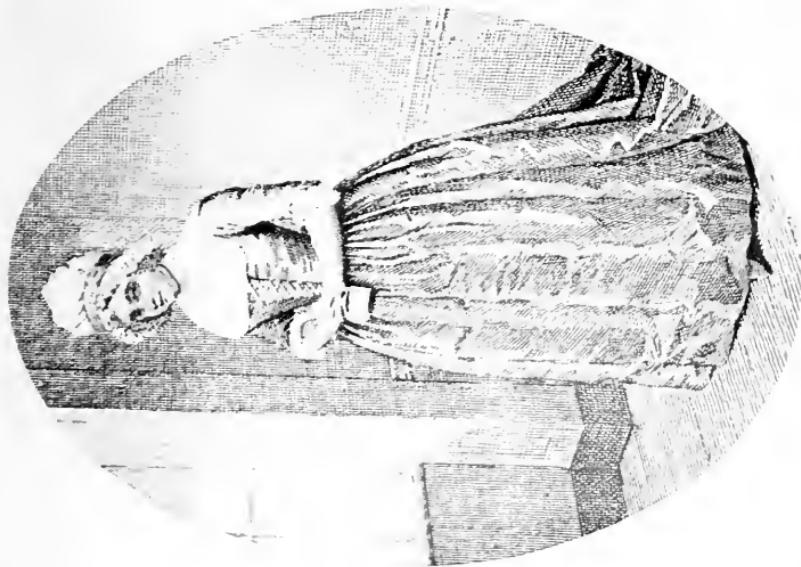
THE all-important event in the theatrical world in 1797 was the retirement of Miss Farren on the occasion of her marriage to Lord Derby, and the playgoers of London sighed and wondered how, to quote Boaden's words, "the chasm was going to be filled." There had been no marriage of an actress into the aristocracy since that of Lavinia Fenton—"Polly Peachum," of *The Beggar's Opera* fame—in 1751, and the town had a fertile subject for gossip. But there was no scandal attached to Eliza Farren. She was immaculate, and the pursuit of her by Fox had left her unscathed.

Thanks to amateur theatricals which had been the rage for some years Miss Farren made the acquaintance of many well-to-do people, and as her reputation was unblemished she was admitted to an intimacy and to a friendship with noble families which was unattainable either by Mrs. Abington or Mrs. Jordan. The latter, indeed, was rarely recognised in private by the great ladies. Lady Mary Feilding expressed the general opinion of these dames when, in a letter from Portsmouth to Lady Mary Talbot, she wrote indignantly: "What do you think of the Prince of Wales at the Duke of Clarence's fête—handing out Mrs. Jordan before the Countess of Athlone and the Duchess of Bolton? I say that the Duchess and Countess were

very well served for putting themselves in such company.”

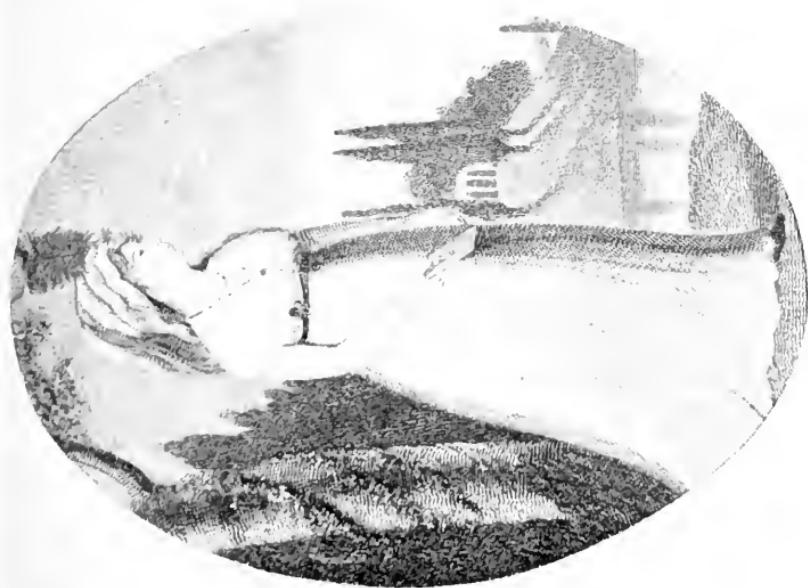
But with Miss Farren it was different, and as she was of great use in the dramatic performances given at the Duke of Richmond’s house, and was regarded with great esteem by the Hon. Mrs. Damer, she met the members of the aristocracy on almost an equal footing, especially when her discreet association with the Earl of Derby became known, as it was whispered that when the existing Countess, who was a great invalid, died, Miss Farren would become her successor. Meanwhile there was no scandal. Miss Farren was a model of discretion, and she also had, as Tate Wilkinson puts it, an “anxious and serupulously watchful Mamma.” Mrs. Farren, who had herself been on the stage and doubtless knew what “things were,” never, we learn, either in society or in public (except upon the stage) quitted the presence of her “matchless daughter.” “Mamma” must have been a nuisance to everybody, but in the long run the duenna system paid.

Mrs. Papendieck, in her *Court and Private Life in the Time of Queen Charlotte*, has another version of the affair. “The Earl of Derby,” she writes, “had made her an offer of protection which she immediately convinced him it was not her intention to accept. He then begged that she would agree to marry him on the death of his wife, who was in ill health. This she in part accepted, but upon condition that he would only see her in company, as she was determined to pay every attention to her profession for the support of herself, her mother, and her sister. Lord Derby agreed, but insisted upon her using his carriage. That she also refused, but at last it was settled that a coach with every appendage for travelling and for London work should be kept for her in my lord’s mews; that two footmen should attend, and if at any time pecuniary assistance should be required that she should apply to him only as a friend. No jewels or presents were to be offered



MRS. SUMNER ("BECKY" WELLS) AS ANNE LOVELACE IN  
"A BOLD STROKE FOR A WIFE,"

From an engraving by Thorntwaite, after De Wilde.



MISS DE CAMP,  
From an engraving by Thorntwaite, after De Wilde.



and every decorum was to be observed." Every condition which primness and propriety demanded was thus fulfilled and the arrangement seems to have answered the purpose intended, for it gave rise to no scandal.

If an anecdote which Mrs. Inchbald tells of Miss Farren be true it would almost appear that she possessed an excess of prudery. "To have fixed the degrees and shades of female virtue possessed at this time by the actresses of the Haymarket Theatre," writes the lady, "would have been employment for an able casuist. One evening about half an hour before the curtain was drawn up, some accident having happened in the dressing-room of one of the actresses, a woman of known intrigue, she ran in haste to the dressing-room of Mrs. Wells (Mrs. Sumbel, better known as 'Becky' Wells, so named from a character in which she made a hit) to finish the business of her toilet. Mrs. Wells, who was the mistress of the well-known Captain Topham, shocked at the intrusion of a reprobated woman who had a worse character than herself, quitted her own room and ran to Miss Farren's, crying, 'What would Captain Topham say if I were to remain in such company ?' No sooner had she entered the room to which as an asylum she had fled than Miss Farren flew out of the door repeating, 'What would Lord Derby say if I should be seen in such company ?'"

There is a decided suggestion of the "young person" in the attitude assumed by Miss Farren towards Mrs. Wells. But it is a feminine characteristic to conceal the real motive which prompts a bitter retort. Becky Wells was one of the most beautiful women of her day, and she had a spontaneity of spirits and a zest for adventure which amounted to eccentricity. These qualities were sufficient to make her disliked by her own sex. But Miss Farren had another grievance. Mrs. Wells in her *Memoirs* tells how, on attending a rehearsal for *The Suspicious Husband*, Miss Farren entered the green-room and,

staring her in the face, exclaimed, "Good God, ma'am, are you to play Jacintha?" Becky replied that she was, on which Miss Farren immediately turned to the acting manager and told him she intended to throw up the part of Clarinda, as she was certain Mrs. Wells could not play the character she had undertaken. This was enough for the impulsive Becky. She was not the one to endure such an insult "from a woman who had only lately emancipated *herself* from the trammels of a strolling company" and, throwing down her part, she departed. As Miss Farren was the aggressor the management decided against her, and she was obliged, much to her mortification, to play Clarinda to Mrs. Wells's Jacintha. It is thus easy to see why the snub related by Mrs. Inchbald was inflicted. But the story may have been invented. Stage history is full of *ben trovatos*. Mrs. Inchbald did not care for Mrs. Wells, while Mrs. Siddons detested her, as of course, she would. Like most clever people who are not afraid to show that they *are* clever, Becky had plenty of enemies.

On another occasion Mrs. Wells scored off Miss Farren. Becky wanted to play in *The Fair Circassian*, but the manager objected because of her little experience in tragedy, and the piece was in consequence withdrawn. "But," writes the sprightly lady maliciously, "Miss Farren afterwards performed it to very bad houses; however, if she gained no credit by it she at least had the satisfaction of viewing her picture in every caricature shop in London"—an allusion to Sayers's caricature of Eliza in *The Fair Circassian*.

Miss Farren could scarcely have been popular with her fellow-aactresses. She was too "superior," and probably she showed that she knew it. Her constant mingling with high society was not calculated to endear her to other ladies of the stage. Horace Walpole, with many other notabilities, took a great deal of notice of her. Here are a few out of

the many references to her in his letters. Writing to Miss Berry he says: "I supped at Miss Farren's last night. There were only Lord Derby and Lady Milner." And again: "*Apropos* to Catherine and Petruchio, I supped with their representatives, Kemble and Mrs. Siddons, t'other night at Miss Farren's." On September 29, 1793, we have this passage: "In the evening we went together to Miss Farren's, and besides her duenna-mother found her at piquet with her unalterable Earl (of Derby)." Walpole quaintly adds: "*Apropos*, I have observed of late years that when *Earls* take strong attachments they are more steady than other men." Earls apparently altered considerably some years later. In old-fashioned fiction they were generally pictured as "accomplished *roués*."

In a sprightly note (December 14, 1793), which reads as though the observant Horace was "getting at" the noble lord, he records: "As I was going to fold my letter, Lord Derby and Miss Farren came in: from good breeding I was dumb on politics. At last she asked me if any news. I said coolly, as if relating some trifle, 'The Duke of Brunswick has totally dispersed the French army!' The Earl's circular face became oblong. I added with the same composure, 'and the King of Prussia has taken his part decidedly.' The Earl said, 'I suppose he is well paid for it?' And then, to comfort himself, 'Macbride says Lord Moira must return'—which I do not believe." Elsewhere Walpole speaks of the east wind which had kept him indoors for ten days as being "as constant as Lord Derby."

Rogers tells of going to spend the day at Streatham with Mr. and Mrs. Piozzi to meet Miss Farren, and of his distress in consequence of gnat-bites, which had swollen his eyes. He writes: "It was only by the application of laudanum to my *wounds* that I was enabled to keep my engagement. Nothing could exceed the elegance and refinement of Miss Farren's appearance and manners." Mrs. Piozzi, like many

other society ladies, was very impatient to see the outcome of the affair with Lord Derby, and writes on February 9, 1796: “ Will Miss Farren’s coronet *never* be put on ? I thought the paralytic Countess would have made way for her long ago.”

After all, perhaps, Miss Farren is to be excused her bursts of loftiness, for the outside public had no doubts concerning the forthcoming marriage. We get an amusing sidelight on this in the diaries of the Hon. Frances Williams Wynn. “ I certainly recollect Miss Farren on the stage,” Miss Wynn records, “ and remember very clearly her taking leave of it, but nothing remains on my mind which would lead me from my own knowledge to say that she was an excellent actress. I know I was told so, but in the part of Lady Teazle, in which I saw her frequently, I could not point out one prominent part which has left on my mind an impression of excellency. Perhaps the absence of prominent parts may to a certain degree be considered as the characteristic of that never-failing elegance and ease which marked her performance. Perhaps, too, it is just the sort of excellency which is the least likely to strike and captivate a very young person. I recollect, not the admirable acting in the famous screen scene, but the circumstance of seeing Lord Derby leaving his private box to creep to her behind the scene ; and of course we all looked with impatience for the discovery, hoping the screen would fall a little too soon and show to the audience Lord Derby as well as Lady Teazle.”

We are inclined to hazard the suggestion that Miss Farren was over-rated. It has been the fashion to grow enthusiastic whenever she is mentioned, but we do not find that the enthusiasm concerns her acting so much as her appearance. Curiosity and the advertisement which her connection with Lord Derby gave her must have had much to do with drawing the crowd. There is in the chorus of praise—sometimes very extravagant—which we get in the criticism of nearly everybody who has written about

her, one prolonged monotonous note of her “elegance,” her “genteel” deportment; of her wearing her fine clothes with the air of a lady; of her grace of movement and manner. We are not told that she made any particular effect in the delivery of any particular line or lines; she gave no new reading to any of her parts, indicating that she possessed originality of thought, nor is there any evidence that she was distinguished for facial expression beyond that with which nature had endowed her. She was just the fine lady—nothing more.

Does the writer who in the *New Monthly Magazine* (1829) gave his recollections of her go further than what we have advanced? He writes: “Her figure is considerably above the middle height and is of that slight texture which allows the use of full and flowing drapery. Her face, though not regularly beautiful, is animated and prepossessing; her eye, which is blue and penetrating, is a powerful feature when she chooses to employ it on the public, and either flashes with spirit or melts with softness, as its mistress decides on the expression she wishes to convey. Her voice we never thought to possess much sweetness, but it is refined and feminine, and her smiles fascinate the heart as her form delights the eyes. In short, a more complete exhibition of graces and accomplishments never presented itself for admiration before the view of an audience.”

He defines her limitations when he says: “All that the imagination can conceive of a woman of fashion we should find, every truth realised and every conception embodied in the person and acting of Miss Farren.” It may have been so if the ideal woman of fashion of Congreve and Farquhar be meant. This ideal was most probably a matter of tradition. Miss Farren, from the nature of her early training, was well grounded in “tradition,” and her lady of fashion was of the stage and not a reproduction of the lady of her day.

Truth to tell, the fashionable lady of the last

quarter of the eighteenth century had a good deal of vulgarity about her. The anything but decorous conduct of the Prince of Wales and his "set" had led to a great deterioration of manners, and the gambling spirit which possessed women in high life at that period did not improve them. A few days before Miss Farren's retirement, ladies of *ton* had a bombshell thrown into their midst by the prosecution of Lady Buckinghamshire, Lady Luttrell, and Mrs. Sturt for keeping a faro table, and to their great indignation these high-born dames were fined £50 each. The significant point bearing on manners is furnished by the evidence of one of the servants; and we read in *The Times* of March 15, 1797, that "the ladies who frequented the gaming tables were not very precise in their expressions towards each other—the accusation of cheating was a very common term; and," adds the paragraphist caustically, "we have no doubt it was frequently very truly applied."

Cards were played everywhere, from Brookes's Club down to quiet country houses. One good lady who had invited Mrs. Phillip Lybbe Powys and her husband to meet some friends, expressed herself "quite hurt that Mr. Powys and herself should be there the first time when she had hardly any company, 'Only seven tables, and that is so very few, ma'am.'" Mrs. Powys elsewhere writes: "The Bishop of Meath preach'd an excellent sermon at this season at Bath against card parties and concerts on Sunday evenings. His wife went the day after to pay a morning visit to an old lady who told her she was very angry with her husband as she had just received twenty-eight cards of refusals to her next Sunday's party. 'Oh, how glad I am,' said Mrs. O'Berne, 'to hear this.' The lady bridled up and replied, 'However, it shall not hinder my parties.'"

It is to the credit of "Perdita" Robinson that three years before Lady Buckinghamshire and her two friends were hauled before the justices she tried to arrest the devouring passion by writing a farce,

which she called *Nobody*—to avoid invidious application, we presume—intending to be a satire on female gambling. After it was cast, one of the principal performers (probably Miss Farren) gave up her part, alleging that the piece was intended to ridicule her particular friends. Another actress also, though in herself a host, was intimidated by a letter informing her that “*Nobody* should be damned”; the author herself had a letter to the same effect. On the drawing up of the curtain several persons in the galleries whose liveries betrayed their employers were heard to declare that they were sent to “do up *Nobody*.” Even women of distinguished rank hissed through their fans. The more rational part of the audience were inclined to hear before they passed judgment, and insisted that the piece should proceed. For two or three nights the theatre presented a scene of confusion and then the farce was withdrawn.

Miss Farren’s lady of fashion was, of course, highly acceptable to her select circle of friends, but with all its grace and elegance it must have been slightly cold and colourless. Miss Wynn found her Lady Teazle unimpressive. Miss Wynn was young at the time, but this makes her testimony more valuable, as young people, in their likes and dislikes, are generally honest and unprejudiced. What she thought certainly receives confirmation from Mrs. Charles Mathews, who was of opinion that “the view taken by Mrs. Jordan of this favourite character was the genuine one, and were we required to name a model for Sheridan’s heroine we should say that Miss Mellon at the time she married Mr. Coutts was *in all externals* (and some essentials) the *beau ideal* of what Lady Teazle ought to appear—namely, a young glowing beauty, endued with great natural powers of mind, talents, and vivacity, but with all these bearing about her an insuperable rusticity of air and manners.”

## CHAPTER IX

Lord Derby's odd appearance—Miss Farren's sentimental outburst to Harriot Mellon—Lady Mary Coke's reference to the flirtations of the first Countess of Derby—Her elopement with the Duke of Dorset—Death of the Countess, and public curiosity concerning Miss Farren—Comments of the newspapers—Her farewell performance—Harriot Mellon “bathed in tears”—Curious story of Miss Farren's valedictory address—Miss Farren's alleged meanness—Anthony Pasquin's biography of her—Pasquin's black-mailing of Mrs. Abington.

FRESH from the makeshifts of a travelling company, its rough manners, and sordid surroundings, to Harriot Mellon that an actress was about to marry a peer of the realm must have been like a page torn from a romance. Her biographer tells us that “when Lord Derby and other theatrical noblemen would assemble around Miss Farren, Miss Mellon used to stand near this glass of fashion”—in silent admiration, we may presume. We are further told that “Lord Derby was a very singular-looking little man for a lover. Although at this time but forty-five, he looked fifteen years older. He had an excessively large head, surmounting a small, spare figure, and wore his hair tied in a long thin pigtail. This, with his attachment to short nankeen gaiters, made him an easily recognised subject in the numerous caricatures of the day.” We are enabled to reproduce two of these pictorial skits (P. 80), in which it will be seen that the artist has made full use of the pigtail.

Mrs. Baron-Wilson lapses into sentiment in recording how Harriot, while waiting in the green-room for her “call,” began to hum a popular dance-tune and move her foot in time. “You happy girl,” whispered Miss Farren, “I would give worlds to be like you,” and the future Duchess of St. Albans, thinking of her thirty shillings a week, is made to reply



THE EARL OF DERBY.  
From an engraving by A. Smith, after R. Corbould.



MISS FARREN.  
From an engraving by Biddle.



sententiously that “there certainly must be a vast deal to be envied in *her* position by one who commanded what she pleased!” Pressing her hand kindly, Miss Farren’s eyes became full of tears as she replied: “I cannot command such a *light heart* as prompted your little song.” Why not? what had Miss Farren to be sad about? She was nearly forty, and after rubbing elbows with the aristocracy for so long she had no reason to fear being slighted after entering its ranks. Mrs. Baron-Wilson is not too liberal with dates, and we are not told when this emotional outburst of confidence took place. Perhaps at the time there was no prospect of the Earl being free to marry again.

That moment arrived in due course, for on March 14, 1797, the Countess died. She was Lady Elizabeth Hamilton, the eldest daughter of the beautiful Elizabeth Gunning, Duchess of Hamilton, and there is nothing particular to be said about her beyond that she was an incorrigible flirt. In the young lady’s single days Lady Mary Coke was sorely exercised in her mind concerning the attentions paid by the Duke of Devonshire to Lady Betty, and at the exertions made by Lady Gower to bring about the match. Lady Mary records how the Duke sat with the Duchess of Argyll and Lady Betty Hamilton “almost the whole night at the Opera,” and adds, “It is a point of perfect indifference to me who the Duke marries, but I cannot help supposing it will be Lady Betty: if it is not so, his Grace most certainly does not behave properly.” From Lady Mary’s point of view his Grace did not so behave, for the lady was married to the Earl of Derby in the June of the following year.

Another entry in which Lady Betty Hamilton figures we cannot resist quoting. Lady Mary Coke was never happy away from the card table and her favourite game “Lu,” and she records going to a card party at Bedford House, at which Lady Betty Hamilton was present. The party was “made” for the Princess Amelia and “at the beginning,”

writes Lady Mary, “ I won twenty guineas, but the room was so excessively cold that the Princess desired that the table might be brought nearer the fire, which obliged us all to change our places and gave a terrible turn to the cards : I not only lost the twenty guineas back but six and thirty of my own.” Ladies of title gambled right merrily before the days of faro.

From what Mrs. Papendieck says in her artless way it would seem that the Countess had no overpowering affection for her husband, but was persuaded into her marriage. “ Her bridal entertainment, which was given at the Oaks in Surrey,” the good Charlotte Papendieck tells us, “ consisted of every amusement that ingenuity could invent. The invitations were general, and the fête began at noon and lasted till the usual hour of breaking up. Bartholomew, a violin player who was always called upon when neither Giardini nor Cramer could be obtained, led the concert in the evening, when his famous rondo called “ The Maid of the Oaks ” was performed by him with variations, and for years was a favourite. The ballads, dances, etc., of the time all bore the title or sounded the praises of the Maid of the Oaks.

“ Alas ! this beautiful maid, after becoming a wife and the mother of a boy and girl, left her bed and decamped with the Duke of Dorset. They begged a divorce, but my lord of Derby would not agree to it. Soon the Duke deserted her and she lingered out many years in solitude and ill-health. Now the Earl in his turn tried for a divorce, but as many years had elapsed since the circumstance took place and the Duke of Dorset was now married he could not succeed.” *Apropos* of “ The Maid of the Oaks ” General Burgoyne, who distinguished himself more with his pen than with his sword in the American War—he had to surrender with his army to General Gates at Saratoga—wrote a “ dramatic entertainment ” to which he gave the same title.

Directly it was announced that the Countess was dead everybody knew what would follow, and the newspapers burst into loud laments. "Mrs. Pope is no more," cried *The Times*. "Miss Farren and Miss Wallis are to be sprung 'more and better.' What is to become of the stage? Oh! dear Buffoonery, what a triumph art thou about to share." Mrs. Pope, once Miss Younge, had died during the week, and Miss Wallis of Covent Garden Theatre was shortly to marry a man of fortune. As for the age of buffoonery there seems to have been a fear that with Miss Farren genteel comedy would also depart.

A writer in *The Monthly Mirror* at this date draws a gloomy picture of the prospects of comedy and complains that of every new play produced "the universal cry is, 'Will it make us laugh?' Thus sense, truth, nature, are all devoted to this single object." It cannot be denied that this period of the drama was a barren one, and so it continued to be for some years. No comedies had supplanted *She Stoops to Conquer* and *The School for Scandal*, and it was a far cry from Sheridan to O'Keefe and Reynolds. All that these dramatists wrote has long been forgotten, even O'Keefe's *Wild Oats*, which struggled long to keep its place on the stage.

Meanwhile curiosity was all agog as to when the one and only Farren would make her farewell bow. Nothing had been announced, and there seemed to be a dread lest she should spring a surprise upon her admirers and vanish without making a sign. *The Oracle and Public Advertiser*, a journal which dealt much with the stage, and generally in a lavishly complimentary style sometimes verging upon the absurd, warned its readers two days after the Countess of Derby's death that "Lord Derby, we have reason to believe, will immediately lead Miss Farren to the altar. Of course this evening may be the last the public can have the opportunity of witnessing her great powers. She performs Lady Townley." On the 17th so great was *The Oracle's* anxiety to be ahead of its rivals

that it came out with : “ Miss Farren, it was last night reported, has already been elevated to the rank of the Countess of Derby ” ; and on the 21st, by way of qualifying this statement without withdrawing it, remarked that “ to do away with much importunate nonsense upon this subject—however desirous Lord Derby may be to fulfill his engagements with an amiable woman he is not a likely man to forget the decorum due to the mother of his children.” In the same issue *The Oracle* excelled itself in its account of the funeral of Mrs. Pope in Westminster Abbey, and quite overcome with the demeanour of Mr. Wroughton, the Drury Lane stage-manager, was moved to write that he “ was most obviously affected. We have never seen anything more interesting than the gentlemanly propriety of his regret.”

Paragraphs came thick and fast. “ Miss Farren’s departure from the theatre is expected daily.” “ Miss Farren retires immediately at the end of the season. Lord Derby has the greatest pleasure in fulfilling his obligation.” (It is of course the fatuous *Oracle* which says this.) “ The settlement sum upon the new Countess is mentioned at £2,000 per annum.” “ It is hoped she will come forward annually for the Theatrical Fund.” “ She will very shortly be married to the Earl of Derby, the writings being already drawn up.” And, in the feeble joking of the day : “ Miss Farren is to play in *The Wedding Day* on Monday next.”

At last the day came, the 8th of April, but no special announcement was made, and until the audience were actually in the house it was not definitely known whether her farewell would be taken. But it was suspected this would be the case. An enormous crowd besieged the doors, several persons were hurt in getting to their boxes, and more than one carriage was smashed by the crush of the hackney coaches and the unruliness of their drivers, who at this time had earned a bad name for rudeness and violence. Miss Farren took her leave of the stage as Lady

Teazle, and we read that her dress, “ which for an elegant combination of taste and richness was universally admired, consisted of a gold embroidery on a *coquelicot* ground.”

Mrs. Charles Mathews says that she “ had never performed with greater animation and better spirits than on this occasion, nor until the play drew near to the close was the least alteration observable ; her manner then visibly changed—indeed, she became unable to conceal how deeply she was affected. Her concluding words . . . were delivered falteringly : ‘Let me also request, Lady Sneerwell, that you will make my respects to the scandalous college of which you are a member and inform them that Lady Teazle, licentiate, begs leave to return the diploma they granted her *as she leaves off practice and kills characters no longer.*’ A passionate burst of tears here revealed the sensibility of the speaker ; while a stunning burst of a more cheering, though not less feeling nature from the audience followed and no more of the play was listened to.”

An address was then spoken by Wroughton, the stage-manager, which ran thus :

“ But ah ! this night adieu the mirthful mien,  
When Mirth’s lov’d favourite quits the mimic scene ! ”

At this point Wroughton paused and looked at Miss Farren, who stood supported by King (Sir Peter Teazle) and Miss Miller, the whole of the *dramatis personæ* standing round. Then he went on :

“ Startled Thalia would assent refuse,  
But Truth and Virtue sued and won the Muse.

“ Aw’d by Sensation it could ill express,  
Tho’ mute the tongue, the bosom feels not less :  
Her *speech* your kind indulgence oft has known,  
Be to her *silence* now that kindness shown ;  
Ne’er from her mind th’ endeared record will part,  
But live the proudest feeling of a grateful heart.”

According to Boaden, Wroughton spoke “ *her*

acknowledgments, which she declined doing for herself, and then the Countess-elect advanced and curtsied to the *right*, to the *left*, and the *front*, as is usual upon occasions of high ceremonial."

Neither *The Times* nor *The Oracle* gives these particulars, but the first-named has a curious piece of information about the valedictory address. "With respect to the farewell lines spoken by Mr. Wroughton," it remarks, "no address was intended, but it being found that the audience expected something, Mr. Wroughton turned poet. The last six lines were written by Mr. Sheridan during the second act." *The Monthly Mirror*, however, contradicted this, asserting that the lines, which it terms "wretched doggerel," and not without reason, were not Sheridan's, and that they were written two days before the performance! Which authority was right it is impossible to say; the discrepancy is only in accordance with what is peculiar to stage history.

*The Oracle's* remarks must not be overlooked. They are couched in the spirit of an obituary notice—perhaps the writer had not recovered from the effects of Wroughton's exemplary behaviour at Mrs. Pope's funeral—and began "We have barely room to lament with the public the irreparable loss which the Stage has sustained by the retirement of this admirable actress. Her sensibility was such that her theatrical experience was languid, though now and then she bursts forth in her usual excellency." Towards the end of the notice we have this remarkable statement: "Her admirable husband was received in his box with the loudest acclamations, and his LOVELY BRIDE retired with the warmest congratulations of an affectionate people." Could Royalty have been addressed in more respectful terms? As for the "admirable husband," *The Oracle* was three weeks before the time, but it had made up its mind the marriage had taken place, and it stuck to its guns.

Harriot Mellon had no share in the comedy, but

“with her warm heart overflowing,” writes Mrs. Baron-Wilson in one of her gushes, “stood bathed in tears at the wing and followed to the sofa where Miss Farren was placed. As the latter recovered a little she was assisted to her dressing-room ; and passing the weeping girl, addressed her kindly and said smiling : “So there *is* a way to cloud even *your* enviable spirits.”

After this affecting passage it is somewhat of a shock to find the emotional biographer recording the shortcomings of the fine lady of fashion. With all the elegance Miss Farren had acquired from mixing with her aristocratic friends (Horace Walpole attributes her excellence to the fact that “she has lived with the best style of men in England”) she had also a very common fault of great ladies—meanness. On quitting the stage it is the custom of the vanishing “star” to make handsome presents to the humble employees of the theatre. Miss Farren thought one week's wages—nine shillings—to her dresser and half a crown to the call-boy sufficient, and many were the sarcastic comments in consequence. Mrs. Baron-Wilson endeavours to account for this cheapskating spirit by observing that “it is not likely that Lady Derby could have been aware that such paltry sums were given to her attendants ; they were too miserable even for parsimony,” but the excuse enabled her to add : “But it was a pity, for her name's sake, that she was not as careful of her servants as Miss Mellon, who in 1815, when she retired, settled £30 per annum on her dresser for life and something proportionately liberal on the call-boy.”

The end of Miss Farren's theatrical career was marked ingloriously by the publication of Petronius Arbiter's *Biography of the Countess of Derby*, to which we have already alluded.

The biography is not so reprehensible for its inaccuracies as for its vindictive spirit. John Williams (Petronius Arbiter, better known as the scurrilous Anthony Pasquin) was the terror of the minor actors

and actresses, and among his unpleasant habits was one of calling on them in the morning, asking them if they dined at home, and, finding that they did, would impudently order them to get a particular dish and sometimes bring an acquaintance with him at the appointed hour. This practice he carried on for many years, almost subsisting upon timid painters and performers, musical and theatrical, who were afraid of his attacks in newspapers or in his abusive verses. Mrs. Abington stood in terror of him. She had not in the earlier part of her life been exactly a votaress of Diana, and Williams, trading on this systematically blackmailed her, and only death set her free. Whether he ever approached Miss Farren in a blackmailing spirit is doubtful. She had no vulnerable "past" as had her rival queen of comedy. Perhaps this accounts for the venom of the *Biography*.

Petronius Arbiter's attack was answered by an anonymous writer, who gave to his rejoinder the magniloquent title of "The testimony of truth to Exalted Merit in a Biographical sketch of the right honourable the Countess of Derby in refutation of a false and scandalous libel." No notice beyond this was taken of Williams's scurrility. His character was sufficiently defined in the year of Miss Farren's marriage in a judgment given by Lord Kenyon in an action brought by Williams against Robert Faulkner, the bookseller, for a libel contained in Gifford's poem "The Baviad." "It appears to me," said his lordship, "that the author of 'The Baviad' has acted a very meritorious part in exposing this man, and I do most earnestly wish and hope that some method will ere long be fallen upon to prevent all such unprincipled wretches from going about unbridled in society to the great annoyance and disquietude of the public." Williams may be fitly dismissed with Kenny's witticism on the news of his death in 1821, that Anthony Pasquin, who was a very dirty fellow, "died of a cold caught by washing his face!"

It only remains to add of Miss Farren that she can lay claim to the distinction of her portrait, as an etching after Sir Thomas Lawrence, being sold for the highest price ever given for a Bartolozzi, namely, £609.

## CHAPTER X

The emotional excesses of the eighteenth century—Mrs. Siddons silenced by an uproar at the Liverpool Theatre—Harriot's curious experience at Liverpool—The sympathetic sailor—Harriot Mellon's promotion at Drury Lane—Again at Liverpool and witnesses the tragic death of John Palmer—Retirement of Mrs. Abington—Her opinion of Harriot Mellon—“Monk” Lewis and *The Castle Spectre*—“Gothic” stories and melodrama—Harriot's further advancement—The restrictions imposed upon the minor theatres—The vicissitudes of the Lyceum—Astley builds the Olympic—Macklin and Sadler's Wells—Harriot refuses an offer to appear at Astley's.

THE vacancy caused by the retirement of Miss Farren promoted the other comedy actresses. Mrs. Jordan played genteel comedy—to her disadvantage Genest considered—and Harriot Mellon often filled parts which otherwise she would never have had. Reynolds wrote a successful play called *The Will*, and in his *Memoirs* he says: “Cicely Copesley, the game-keeper's daughter in my comedy, was performed by Miss Mellon with considerable effect. I little thought at that time that I was to become the vassal of this young handsome Cicely Copesley. Mrs. Coutts is now (1827) my ‘Lady of the Manor’ for under her I hold a small copyhold estate near Chelmsford in Essex, and by an old feudal law (which though obsolete is still unrepealed) she might compel me, *gout and all*, to attend and serve at her next Highgate public breakfast in *armour*.” This passage, when the book was published, evoked a sneer from *The Age*, which at the time, as we shall see, was continually girding at Mrs. Coutts. In comparison with some of the bitter attacks made upon her the sneer was quite harmless.

A second visit to Liverpool followed the end of the season at Drury Lane in 1797. Mrs. Siddons was engaged at the same time and had quite a new ex-

perience for her ; she played one of her greatest “crying” parts—Jane Shore—in dumb show, owing to the uproar persisted in by the gallery audience, which had causes of resentment against certain Liverpool merchants who were present with their families in the boxes.

One of the most curious features of the closing years of the eighteenth century was that, despite the grossness, the vulgarity, the over-eating, the over-drinking, the passion for gambling, the excesses of various kinds, the period was highly emotional. Sentiment was carried to a pitch of absurdity everywhere, and especially on the stage. Mrs. Siddons could always be relied upon to draw the tear, and other actresses, whether in tragedy or sentimental comedy, did their best to follow her example. Women—and men—allowed themselves to be so engrossed by the woes of the stage heroine that in the pathetic moments sobs could be heard all over the house. Miss Burney notes how two young ladies were so distressed at the death of Douglas in Home’s tragedy of that name that “they both burst into a loud fit of roaring and sobbed on afterwards for almost half the farce.” How Mrs. Siddons in *Jane Shore* sent Crabb Robinson into a fit of hysterics and he had to be carried out laughing and weeping has already been told. Ladies fainted at her performance of Isabella, others screamed, the men snuffled and choked with sobs.

Before the reaction in favour of boisterous mirth lamented by *The Times* and *The Monthly Mirror* set in, nothing was applauded but tragedy. “The farces, which before had won a laugh,” says Mrs. Kennard in her biography of Mrs. Siddons, “were now not listened to. The young actress so completely depressed the spirits of the audience that the best comic actor seemed unable to raise them.” Reynolds tells of two young ladies who, being privileged to witness Mrs. Siddons rehearsing, wept the whole time, and continued to weep the rest of the day in

anticipation of the tears which were to flow in the evening.

When Mrs. Siddons played Isabella in Dublin her reputation for drowning the house in tears had preceded her, and one of the Irish papers was moved to perpetrate a skit on a supposed performance of hers, in the course of which we are told that "several fainted even before the curtain drew up! But when she came to the scene of parting with her wedding ring, ah! what a sight was there! the very fiddlers in the orchestra, 'albeit unused to the melting mood,' blubbered like hungry children crying for their bread and butter, and when the bell rang for music between the acts the tears ran from the bassoon player's eyes in such plentiful showers that they choked the finger stops and, making a spout of the instrument, poured in such torrents on the first fiddler's book that, not seeing the overture was in two sharps, the leader of the band actually played in one flat."

It must be owned, however, that Mrs. Siddons was exceptionally gifted in the art of exciting emotion. In Rowe's play *Tamerlane*, where Aspasia has to witness the strangling of her lover, Monesis, she worked herself to such a pitch of agony and gave such terrible reality to the few convulsive words she tried to utter as she sank a lifeless heap that the audience for a few moments remained in a hush of astonishment, and then, dreading to see any more and concerned about the actress herself, clamoured for the curtain to be dropped and shouted for the manager. The latter assured them that Mrs. Siddons was alive and was recovering, but they would not allow the performance to continue. Holman and the elder Macready, both old staggers, were among the audience, and the former, turning to his companion and looking aghast, said, "Macready, do I look as pale as you?"

When Mrs. Litchfield gave M. G. Lewis's monodrama *The Captive* at Covent Garden ladies were "bathed in tears, others fainting, and some shrieking with terror, while such of the audience as were

able to avoid demonstrations like these, sat aghast with pale horror painted on their countenances. It is said that the very box-keepers took fright." Yet *The Captive* on reading appears the veriest fustian! Soon after the opening of Drury Lane in 1794 a prelude entitled *Poor Old Drury* was presented, and upon the rise of the curtain such a clamour was raised that it was impossible to hear a single word. Palmer and Bannister in vain strove to quell the tumult, but failed, and at length Kemble was obliged to appear. *The Morning Chronicle*, which reported the episode, remarked that "he evidently laboured under the most violent agitation and distress of mind, which he expressed by *tears* and *sobs*."

Whether the rough Liverpool galleryites would have been melted had Mrs. Siddons had the chance of impressing them it is hard to say, but on the occasion mentioned above they were too much concerned over their own woes—they were virtually protesting against the war with France, which meant to them starvation, taxation, the press gang, and other troubles—and the great actress, exclaiming, "It is useless to act," crossed her arms and merely murmured the speeches, Miss Mellon at the wings, in her agitation and anxiety, supplying the necessary tears.

It was during this visit to Liverpool that the episode which is to be found in most collections of stage anecdotes occurred. Well known as the story is one can hardly omit it. Harriot was playing in a little sentimental piece wherein a callous creditor pursues the weeping heroine for debt and threatens to put her in prison. "Then I have no hope—I have not a friend in the world," cries the girl. "What! will no one go bail for you to save you from prison?" "I have told you I have not a friend on earth," she sobbed.

Miss Mellon, who was fond of relating the anecdote, may be allowed to tell the rest—we quote from Mrs. Baron-Wilson. "But just as I was uttering the words, my eyes were attracted by the movements

of a sailor in the upper gallery, who, springing over the railing, was letting himself down from one tier to another until, finally reaching the pit, he bounded clear over the orchestra and footlights and placed himself beside me in a moment, before I could believe the evidence of my senses. ‘Yes, you shall have *one* friend, at least, my poor young woman. I will go bail for you to any amount. And as for *you* (turning to the frightened actor), if you don’t bear a-hand and shift your moorings, you lubber, it will be the worse for you when I come across your bows.’ . . . It was impossible to resume the play, so the orchestra played ‘God save the King,’ while the curtain dropped over the scene, including the chivalric sailor. He was only persuaded to relinquish his care of me by the illusion being still maintained behind the scenes; the manager, pretending to be an old friend of mine, unexpectedly arrived to rescue me from all difficulties with a profusion of theatrical bank-notes.” It sounds unkind to suggest that the illusion was as much due to rum as to Harriot’s realistic acting, but as she ends by saying that the sailor “quietly went home under care of some of the party” one cannot avoid the obvious conclusion.

On Harriot’s return to Drury Lane she was regarded as having made a position, and Kemble assigned her the leading lady in Richard Cumberland’s *The Wheel of Fortune*, Kemble playing Penruddock, a gloomy misanthropic personage of the type much in favour in the days of sentiment. O’Keefe tried his hand at a comedy in which he laboured to give Harriot Mellon a good part. But, owing to the caprice of the management, according to the dramatist, the piece was spoiled by mangling, and it proved a failure. There was compensation for her, however, when she was given the part of Susan in *The Follies of a Day*, which Thomas Holcroft, a singular man, who began life as a stable-boy and ended by writing one of the most popular comedies

of its day, *The Road to Ruin*, smuggled the piece into England in a very enterprising fashion.

Few plays have excited more interest on their production than Beaumarchais' *La Folle Journée ou le Mariage de Figaro*. His *Le Barbier de Séville* (in the English version of which Miss Farren made a hit as Rosina) had been a brilliant success, and the obstacles which for three years stood in the way of its sequel being performed only stimulated public interest. At its first representation more than 300 persons dined in the boxes that they might keep their places, and for two years it was acted two or three times a week.

Holcroft resolved to translate the play and bring it out in England, and rushed over to Paris to procure a copy. This he found was impossible, nor could he take shorthand notes while it was being performed, as has been asserted, as the authorities were on the look out for anything of the kind and he would have been arrested. To get over the difficulty he and a friend went to the theatre every night for a week or ten days, each night, on reaching home, putting down as much as they could recollect of a scene, and then comparing notes. The entire play was gone through in this manner, until perfect exactness was secured. The English version was brought out at Covent Garden, Holcroft playing Figaro. It is now only known to English audiences through the medium of Mozart's delightful music. On its first production, however, it had a song, and only one, "Ah, well-a-day, my poor heart," composed by Shield, who sold it to Longman the publisher for three-and-twenty dozens of wine.

Comparison with Mrs. Jordan, who was fond of playing Susanna, did not show Harriot Mellon to any disadvantage, and it was a proof of her increasing powers when, shortly after, she was given Cowslip in *The Agreeable Surprise*. This was challenging criticism with Mrs. Wells Sumbel, as Cowslip was identified with the beautiful Becky, who not only created the

part, but sent half London wild over its representative. The milliners and mantua-makers copied her dress, and "Cowslip hats" and "Cowslip gowns" were the fashion for several seasons. Among other parts of more or less importance Harriot played Cherry to Kemble's Archer—one can hardly picture the solemn and dignified John Philip as the rakish, amorous Archer—and this also was an advance.

During the season of 1798-9 she was introduced by Sheridan to Mr. Graham, the magistrate at Bow Street, and he and his wife took a great deal of notice of her, and through them she made the acquaintance of Sir Henry and Lady Tempest, who were Mrs. Graham's cousins. Sir Henry Tempest was the owner of Holly Lodge, Highgate, and here Harriot was often invited.

From present appearances we cannot form much idea what Highgate looked like a century or so ago. William Howitt, in his *Northern Heights* (1869), has thrown out a few suggestions which indicate how the filchers of land have laid their hands on unconsidered patches and strips of green where there was no one to say them nay. "There are men not very old living," he writes, "who remember the wide commons of Finchley and Highgate, which lay around an airy expanse. In 1812 or thereabout, they passed into enclosures; even the little open strips of land peeping into the village were imprisoned within garden walls. Not a foot of such folks'-land can now be discerned. But about fifty years ago the people of Highgate made their visits to town in a stage coach which performed the journey in between two and three hours, fare half a crown; and such was the arduous undertaking that the passengers regularly stopped to take tea on their return at the Assembly House, Kentish Town."

In the summer of 1798 Harriot was again engaged at Liverpool, where she had become quite a favourite, and as these provincial trips gave her the chance of playing leading parts, they were of enor-



MISS FARREN DURING THE COURTSHIP OF LORD DERBY.  
From a contemporary caricature.



mous advantage to her. It was during her stay at Liverpool in 1798 that the tragic death of John Palmer occurred. A craze for plays abounding in "sensibility" had followed the adaptation of Kotzebue's tearful productions to suit the English stage, and *The Stranger* and *Lovers' Vows* were greatly in favour. Palmer was announced to appear in the first-named (it was his second performance), and Harriot was to play in the after-piece.

For some time past Palmer had been in financial difficulties, and no doubt was run down in health. While rehearsing he received a letter telling him of the sudden death of a favourite son, and the news affected him so much that he sank into extreme melancholy for some days. It was thought that work would rouse him, and he was urged to appear. He consented, and played Young Wilding in *The Liar* with his usual energy. On the following evening *The Stranger* was put on, and it was noticed that he went through his part mechanically and spiritlessly, and during the interview in the fourth act with his friend, Baron Steinfort, where the latter refers to the Stranger's children, Palmer suddenly became agitated, stopped, and fell back dead.

In nearly every account of the tragedy Palmer is made to utter the words "There is another and a better world" previous to the moment of his seizure, but, as in a good many other theatrical stories, this would appear to be an embellishment put in to heighten the effect. The words are not to be found in the fourth act, but are spoken by the old man Tobias, in the first act and repeated by the Stranger in the third. *The Gentleman's Magazine* for August 1798, in which an account of the affair was given, does not allude to anything of the kind.

The year 1799 saw the retirement of Mrs. Abington. She had lived her life both on and off the stage, and had practically worn herself out. John Taylor speaks of her as having had a close intimacy with a Mr. Nealson, the stockbroker who acted for Mr.

Coutts, and on the gentleman in question falling ill, Taylor called on him and found in the hall a lady who refused to give her name. As the doctor had forbidden his patient seeing visitors she had to go away, still withholding her name. Yet the servant knew perfectly well that she was Mrs. Abington. She was wearing a red cloak, and "her general attire seemed to indicate the wife of an inferior tradesman," a sad falling from the time when the fine ladies were eager to follow her lead in fashions. In her later days she seems to have dropped out of remembrance, and Taylor adds that he "never heard that the theatrical fraternity attended the funeral . . . neither do I know where she died or where she was buried."

Her death occurred in 1815, just before Harriot Mellon retired from the stage to become Mrs. Coutts. It is quite true that her burial-place is unknown, and only brief paragraphs announced the passing away of the accomplished artist, who in her own particular time had no rival. Some little time after she retired, speaking of the various actresses then on the stage, she said: "They are pleasing women; Miss Mellon, for example, sometimes acts the part of a chambermaid and sometimes of a woman of quality; but she is always a chambermaid, better or worse dressed, indeed, but not otherwise differing from herself in private life. There is no representative of the woman of quality now on the stage; and it is impossible that there should be, unless the actress who represents persons of that class of life is admitted into their society, by which only she can obtain a knowledge of their manners and represent them with success." Not very complimentary to Harriot, but, one cannot help thinking, very just.

Matthew Gregory Lewis, "Monk" Lewis, was at this time a rising man of letters, well known and very much sought after in society. When his *Castle Spectre*, a melodrama, and probably the first of its kind in the new romantic spasmodic school (of

which Holcroft's *A Tale of Mystery* is another specimen), was played in 1797, Harriot Mellon had a small part in it, and she had so much improved in 1799 that when Lewis wrote a farce; *Twins, or Is it He or His Brother?*, Harriot was assigned a very good original part. She hoped to make much of it, but, as in the case of O'Keefe's *She's Eloped*, the farce was damned and again she was disappointed.

Lewis was not a humorous writer, nor could he have been an entertaining talker—certainly not in his later years if we may judge from what Byron wrote in his journal entitled *Detached Thoughts*: “Lewis was a good man, a clever man, but a bore—a damned bore—one may say. . . . But I liked Lewis; he was a jewel of a man had he been better set; I don’t mean *personally*, but less *tiresome*, for he was tedious as well as contradictory to everything and everybody.”

His romance of *The Monk*, by which he lost his reputation and which led to his being ostracised by the ultra-sensitive high-life society of the day, is as tedious as Byron found his talk. It is of the same class as the so-called *Gothic Stories* to which Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, and Miss Clara Reeves's *The Old English Baron* belong. Mrs. Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* was another sample of this school of secret doors, spectres, gloom, hired bravos, mysterious foreign noblemen (generally counts, with confidential servants), weeping heroines, and uninteresting sentimental heroes. Apart from Fanny Burney and Sir Walter Scott it is hard to find a writer of fiction who was contented to write from experience or personal observation. England was despised, and the Alps, the Apennines, remote parts of Germany and Spain were annexed to meet the artificial taste of the day.

It was much the same with the drama. “Monk” Lewis's melodramas were in fashion. *The Castle Spectre*, full of absurdities as it is, was a success. Lewis knew his public better than did Sheridan. The

latter wanted to cut out the ghost, but Lewis would not consent. His object was to thrill his audience. He introduced two perfectly superfluous African servants on the ground that the "blacks improved the stage-effect," and he is reported to have said that he would have made his heroines blue if the "stage-effect" could have been promoted thereby. *Rugantino, or The Bravo of Venice*, a hotch-potch of daggers, pistols, masks, disguises, a mirror which is a secret-door, and all the rest of the machinery of melodrama, was as successful as *The Castle Spectre*.

Boaden wrote a play founded on *The Monk* which was played at Drury Lane in 1799. After reading it in the green-room the author observed that he knew nothing so terrible as reading a piece before so critical an audience. "Oh," said Mrs. Powell, laughingly, "I think I know one thing still more terrible." "What could that be?" asked the author. "To be obliged to sit and hear it."

Boaden was given to prolixity, as his various biographies show, and what he was as a dramatist no doubt justified Mrs. Powell's sarcasm. Mrs. Powell, who, but for the pre-eminence of Mrs. Siddons, would have attained high rank, had a ready wit. She married a second time, when her name became Renaud, and was anxious to conceal the fact, not from any unworthy motive, but for private family reasons. An actress in the Covent Garden company who bore by courtesy the name of one of the performers, maliciously addressed her one night in the green-room before a numerous assemblage of actors and visitors thus: "Mrs. Powell, everybody says you're married." "Indeed," retorted Mrs. Powell coldly; "everybody says you are not." Mrs. Powell once played Hamlet and scored a success.

At this time, but for the established comedies—and Shakespeare—there would have been little attraction for the well-seasoned playgoer. The plays in which Harriot Mellon had a part show clearly enough that the sheet-anchor of theatrical manage-

ment was still the "legitimate." Harriot played Celia in *As You Like It*, Inez in *The Wonder*, Ann Lovely in *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, Lydia Languish and, in her higher flights, Miranda in *The Tempest*, and Estifania—always regarded as a test for the comedy actress—in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*. Bannister was Don Michael the "Copper Captain," once identified with Lewis, and under the influence of Bannister's experience Harriot improved immensely. Had she not been found so valuable as a "general utility," and had she not been so ready to make up for the shortcomings of others, there is not much doubt Harriot Mellon would have attained a higher position than that with which she appeared to be contented. A contemporary critic says of her Estifania that "she looked the reckless but beautiful trickstress to the life. In it she could evolve all her youthful recollections of Mrs. Abington, blending them with the tricks taught by Bannister, so that the picture was perfect."

It is curious that Mrs. Charles Mathews in asserting that Harriot Mellon "never donned the doublet and the hose," in other words, that she never impersonated male characters, 'should have forgotten her Albina Mandeville in *The Will* (Reynolds) in 1800. Albina Mandeville, who has for purposes of the plot to wear the uniform of a dashing young naval officer, was one of Mrs. Jordan's most fascinating successes, but in 1800 Dorothea was forty-four, she had lost her slimness, and a fat naval hero was unthinkable. Harriot could not be compared with her unapproachable predecessor at her best, but she did very well.

Apparently in those days a popular actress could do very much as she liked, if she saw her way to make the character she was personating more attractive. When *The Country Girl* was played on May 30, 1800, Mrs. Jordan, who had acted Peggy so often, that it seemed to her somewhat stale, introduced the ballad "The Blue Bells of Scotland," greatly to the indignation of *The Dramatic Censor*, "the popu-

larity" of the song, in the *Censor's* opinion, affording "convincing proof of the frivolity and depraved taste of the age," and "possessing no other recommendation, but *namby pamby* insipidity." The programme concluded with an "entertainment" entitled *The Shipwreck*, Miss Heard at a moment's notice taking a singing part in place of Miss De Camp, who was "reported ill," a circumstance which justifies the *Censor* administering a mild rebuke to Harriot, remarking that the task was rather unfairly imposed upon Miss Heard, as singing was out of her line, "not to mention that there was at the very instant an actress to hand (Miss Mellon) who possesses a good voice and has on former occasions played the part, though (for reasons best known to herself) she now thought fit to decline it."

Early in the nineteenth century the minor theatres were beginning to be restive under the restrictions imposed upon them by the privileges possessed by the two "patent" playhouses, Drury Lane and Covent Garden Theatres; but nothing could be done, and great ingenuity had to be exercised to produce something which would attract the public and yet avoid infringing the "patents."

No theatre has experienced more changes of fortune than the Lyceum. Built about the year 1765 as "an academy and exhibition," a scheme which failed, part of it was converted into a theatre for musical performances, and what it was towards the end of the eighteenth century Dibdin has drawn a vivid picture. He was then giving his variety entertainment there, and he writes: "Before the season of the Wags finished, the Lyceum became so annoying with sparring, waxwork, wild beasts, and Lincolnshire oxen, that I might as well at once have kept a booth at a fair. It was impossible at that time to go in and out of the Lyceum without encountering a monkey or a bear, or Mendoza, or the Duke of Hamilton, or some curious and extraordinary being. In the mornings there was a regular sparring school

on my stage, which circumstance I had not been able to prevent. One morning I had attended to see my instrument stowed away that no mischief might happen to it, and had an opportunity of noticing the elegant group of pugilists. . . . A shrewd fellow employed there announced three gentlemen . . . he was holding forth as usual and dwelling upon the merits of this elegant and fashionable occupation. 'And pray,' said I, 'do they all maintain themselves by boxing?' 'Yes, sir,' said he, 'that and thieving.'"

In 1795 the Lyceum was opened as Hardy's New Circus, with *The Little Devil* from Sadler's Wells, and later on was utilised for the exhibition of the battle pieces of Sir Robert Kerr Porter, whose only claim for recognition was that he covered more canvas than any other painter. The Lyceum is entitled to honourable mention in that it was within its walls that Winsor in 1803 or 1804 demonstrated the possibility of lighting houses by means of gas. At this time lectures were being given in the theatre.

Circus performances and what was termed "burletta," the exact meaning of which is difficult to define—apparently it included everything which did not touch the "patents"—were highly popular. Astley built the Olympic for equestrian entertainments. The Surrey was originally called The Royal Circus, and Sadler's Wells was used for any purpose which might suggest itself to an enterprising and ingenious manager. *The Beggar's Opera* converted into a burletta, and all the dialogue worked into a rhyming jingle to escape the meshes of the Lord Chamberlain, was once performed here.

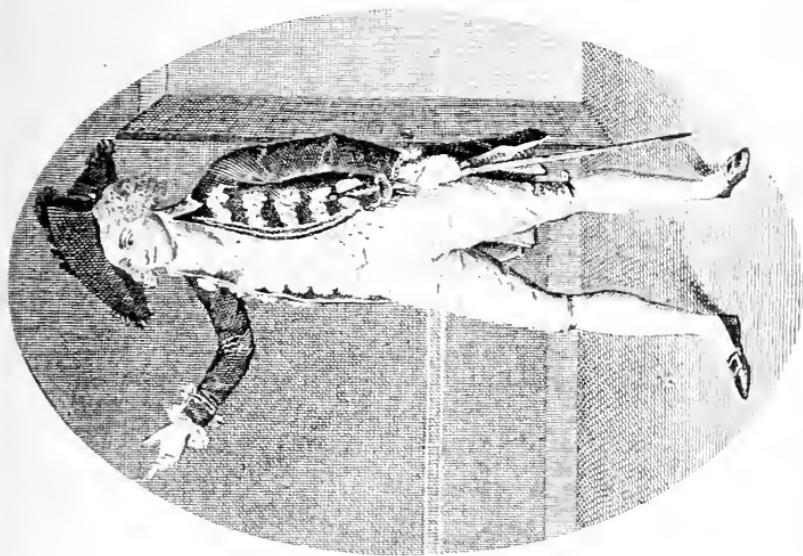
Macklin was fond of relating his reminiscences of Sadler's Wells, how that the price of admission was but threepence, except for a few places "scuttled off" at the sides for sixpence, which were usually reserved for people of fashion who occasionally came to see the fun. "Here we smoked and drank porter and rum-and-water, as much as we could pay for,

and every man that liked it had his doxy and so forth : though we had a mixture of very odd company (for I believe it was a good deal the baiting place of thieves and highwaymen) there was little or no rioting. The entertainment consisted of horn-pipes, ballad singing, a kind of pantomime ballet, and tumbling. It was a daylight show, and there were four or five performances a day ; the length of each depended upon the next crowd waiting to come. When the man outside thought there were enough people for another 'house' he would come to the back of the upper seats and shout, 'Is Hiram Fisterman here ?' This was the signal, and down went the curtain."

The "Wells" was considered a very low place by the *haut ton*, and when Miss Burney heard that Mrs. Siddons had invested money in the proprietary shares which governed the ownership of the theatre she wrote : "I could not hear of it without some amusement. It seemed so extraordinary a combination—so degrading a one, indeed—that of the first tragic actress, the living Melpomene, and something so burlesque as Sadler's Wells." But the great Sarah with all her emotional powers had a very keen eye to the main chance. "I will play anywhere," she is reported to have said, "so long as I am paid." An extraordinary instance of her shabbiness in her transactions with the proprietor of the Edinburgh Theatre is related by Mrs. Kennard.

The realistic drama which Mr. Crummles found so useful for his pump and wheelbarrow, and Drury Lane in its Augustan days for its real hansom cab is no new thing. In 1792 a fox chase, with real hounds and horses, was put on the stage at Covent Garden as part of a pantomime called *Harlequin's Museum*, and the manager, one Hughes, removing to the Surrey Theatre, continued his revolutionary experiments.

His successor, Cross, had ideas more in the direction of the legitimate drama so far as the Lord Chamberlain would permit him to indulge them, and,



MRS. GOODALL AS SIR HARRY WILDAIR IN "THE CONSTANT COUPLE."

From an engraving by Leyey, after De Wille.

MRS. MARTYR AS AURA IN "THE COUNTRY LASSES."

From an engraving by Leyey, after De Wille.



being on the look out for attractive forms and handsome faces, made overtures to Harriot Mellon to appear in a pantomime and dramatic spectacle, *Cora, or The Virgin of the Sun*, founded on *Pizarro*. Mrs. Entwistle, who was still living in the wilds of St. George's Fields and found her duennaship walk to Drury Lane every day rather trying, was in favour of acceptance, especially as Cross offered a much higher salary than Sheridan was paying—and money was everything to the good lady; but Harriot's natural shrewdness was against the proposal, and she declined it. A somewhat similar offer was made by Astley, who had a theatrical project to develop his Dublin establishment, but this also was refused, and wisely, for to have quitted the leading theatre in the United Kingdom would have meant descending the ladder, and though Harriot had no immediate prospects of celebrity she may have felt that she only had to wait her time.

## CHAPTER XI

Harriet Mellon not successful in crying parts—The rage for amateur theatricals—Miss Berry's play *Fashionable Friends*—The Picnic Club—Awkward consequences of its rules—A picnic dinner at Drury Lane Theatre—The Margravine of Anspach's dramatic performances at Brandenburg House—The Dillotanti Theatre—Lord Barrymore's Wargrave theatre—Spouting clubs—Salaries at Drury Lane.

THE first four theatrical years of the nineteenth century were uneventful so far as Harriet Mellon was concerned. Many causes combined to put her somewhat in the background. Her readiness to do anything and assist anybody retarded her advancement in the direction of really important parts. The introduction of Miss Duncan, who had made a name in Edinburgh (she started as an “infant prodigy,” and Miss Farren, who saw the “little wonder” as she was called, hoped to see her at maturity “the future Farren of Drury Lane”), was against her. Miss Duncan had considerable powers as a “genteel” comedy actress and could fill many of the vacancies left by the retirement of Miss Farren. (Boaden says that in some respects she surpassed her predecessor, but had not equal delicacy.)

In the beginning of 1804, with the advent of Master Betty, commenced the mania for infant phenomenons, and his appearances at Drury Lane alternately with those at Covent Garden monopolised everything. Even Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble were temporarily eclipsed. Mrs. Jordan was maintaining her popularity and working very hard, for it is now known that her earnings went to help support the Duke of Clarence, the father of her numerous children, whose conduct towards her was wanting in everything she had a right to expect.

Harriot's chances of distinguishing herself were consequently lessened. Among these chances, however, may be mentioned Lady Teazle, Lydia Languish, Letitia Hardy (*The Belle's Stratagem*), Violante (*The Wonder*), Berinthia (*A Trip to Scarborough*), Sophia (Cumberland's *The Brothers*), Lady Constant (*The Way to Keep Him*), Mrs. Page (*Merry Wives of Windsor*), Celia (*As You Like It*), etc.

Once more she played a breeches part—Aura in *The Country Lasses, or The Custom of the Manor*—and it may be noted in passing that few plays have been more patched and pieced together than this. Its author, Charles Johnson, produced nineteen plays, tragedies, and comedies, and kept a tavern in Bow Street which brought him more money than his pen. There are two plots in *The Country Lasses*, one stolen from Aphra Behn (the lady whose freedom of writing shocked Sir Walter Scott), who had herself appropriated it from *A Mad World my Masters*, and the other from Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Custom of the Country*; incidents in it are also borrowed from Middleton. Its very latest dress was that adapted to it by the late B. C. Stephenson in his popular opera *Dorothy*, wedded to Alfred Cellier's very charming and appropriate music. Of course, many modifications were made to suit operatic exigencies and the taste of the moderns, but the names Lurcher and Dorothy are to be found in the original, and the song commencing "With such a dainty dame none can compare" is versified from the lines "Ten thousand thousand Cupids play in every ringlet of her hair, Millions of little loves wanton in her eyes," spoken by the lover of one of the two girls. Aura's boy's clothes were very rakish, and Harriot's figure must have been extremely "fetching." A favourite exponent of the part of Aura was Mrs. Martyr, a singing actress in her prime during the previous generation, and if there be any truth in Westmacott's insinuations as to the relations between her and Mr. Coutts the character of

Aura brings her and Harriot Mellon very close together.\*

It is pretty evident that Miss Mellon never "found herself" in serious parts. Her sunny face when clouded by grief was not pathetic. Only specially adapted countenances of the pallid *Il Penseroso* type are endurable when oppressed by melancholy. Stage crying is much more difficult to manage than stage mirth. Thin women, as a rule, can alone be trusted to cry with effect. Mrs. Kendal was an exception. She was not thin and she cried most charmingly, with the assistance of the smallest possible lace pocket-handkerchief. Harriot, putting the matter delicately and using the convenient expression in fashion in her day, was inclined to *embonpoint*, and her brilliant colouring and her general aspect of good humour consorted ill with woe. It was not surprising that one of her critics, while praising her Emily Tempest in *Penruddock*, warned her that "she should never attempt seriously to cry; the audience, accustomed to her merry face, thought she was jesting and hailed her tears with laughter."

Amateur theatricals, as we have had occasion to remark, together with card-playing, formed the chief home amusement of the aristocracy, according to the set to which they belonged. The Hon. Mrs. Damer, now that Miss Farren as the Countess of Derby was no longer available, relied for professional assistance, at all events on one occasion, on Harriot Mellon. Miss Berry had found among Horace Walpole's papers a comedy by Boissy, a dramatist in great favour in Paris in the first half of the eighteenth century, and an English adaptation by the fair diarist under the title of *Fashionable Friends* was produced at Strawberry Hill. The Hon. Mrs. Damer, Miss Berry, the Earl of Mount Edgcombe, and other amateurs took part; and Harriot had the honour of coaching the aristocratic company, and the responsibility forced from her the conclusion that "there

\* See Appendix.

never was such a stupid task as drilling fine people." Of course the performance where the critics could not be otherwise than friendly, especially as Miss Joanna Baillie had set her *cachet* on the comedy by writing a prologue and epilogue, was a success.

How much Miss Berry wrote of the play is very uncertain, at any rate she must have considered it had merits, for she arranged with Kemble to have it produced at Drury Lane, where, notwithstanding the assistance of Charles Kemble, King, Barrymore, Suett, Miss De Camp, Miss Pope, and Mrs. Kemble, it was promptly damned, and, what was worse, condemned by the critics for its immoral tendency. Harriot Mellon had no share in the public performance, nor is there any mention of her in the reference to the Strawberry Hill theatricals in Miss Berry's *Letters*. Mrs. Baron-Wilson, however, speaks of a "bill" in existence dated November 28, 1802, having her name upon it in conjunction with the noble players, and we may assume that the matter is beyond dispute.

Miss Berry, after the manner of disappointed authors and dramatists, could not believe that the play failed on account of its want of merit, but imagined that a cabal existed for the purpose of strangling it. The play was afterwards published, and Miss Berry explained in the preface that it was, at the time of its performance, believed to be "the production of some of a certain Picnic Club then existing, much addicted to theatrical amusements, to which the *pit-filling* public (ignorant of its harmless dulness) had endowed with a supposed power of propagating loose principles and profligate wit. This piece, emanating as they believed from such a focus of evil, they indignantly determined to stifle it in its birth, and came to the first night determined to damn without hearing it." The chagrined authoress, no doubt, found much comfort in this explanation, but there does not seem to be any ground for it.

The Picnic Club was quite a feature of the fashion-

able world and was supported by the most advanced set of the *haut ton*. At this club Angelo tells us : " Spouting, music, and sing song were practised in that superior style which suited the more refined ears of the accomplished gentlemen and ladies at the court end." Lady Buckinghamshire, the noble dame whose gambling propensities brought her within the law, was " the nucleus of such a circle as the annals of fashion cannot match." Lady Buckinghamshire appears to have been of the dashing type of fine lady of which Lady Caroline Petersham, little Miss Ashe—Horace Walpole's " Pollard Ashe"—Lady Coventry, and other frisky beauties, were such prominent examples half a century before. " The *éclat* of the Picnic Society," Angelo states, " afforded subject for lampoon in every other society." . . . " Jealousy exerted some to attack this fashionable assembly, and the alarm was sounded in the green-rooms of the two great metropolitan theatres lest the rage for these picnic dramas might leave the legitimate dramatic corps to play to empty boxes."

The idea of the society, which originated at a party at Lady Buckinghamshire's, was taken from the French, the guests being expected each to contribute something towards the viands, pastry, wines, and liqueurs. Assigning the responsibility of each member was fixed by lots ; tickets inscribed with some article for the supper-table being put into a silk bag and drawn. Of course those who had the least money drew the most expensive dishes and *vice versa*, but this was not the only cause of trouble. The three earliest meetings were held in a room in Leicester Square, where a Frenchman named Le Texier was attracting the town by delivering recitations in French. Angelo draws a humorous picture of what happened on the first night. " Lady C—— sent her quota of delicate chickens, and Lord — his quarter of house lamb *undressed*, and this woeful dilemma occurred at nine o'clock . . . there was no cook, and what was still worse, no culinary apparatus ;

for the worthy Monsieur Le Texier never dining at home, not a *casserole* could be found wherein to stew a sprat."

Subsequently the Picnic Society removed to more commodious premises in the Tottenham Rooms, near Tottenham Court Road, and after the first performances, professional actresses took the place of the amateur ladies. The difficulties of embodying strictly the idea of a picnic became apparent and the rules of the club on its removal to the Tottenham Rooms laid down that each member was to pay a subscription of six guineas and send a contribution of six bottles of wine or one guinea. The club lasted three years, when Colonel Greville, its secretary and moving spirit, becoming involved in pecuniary embarrassments, it could no longer be carried on.

Miss Berry's denunciation of the Picnic Club no doubt represented the public attitude, but there was apparently very little ground for condemnation. The names of some of the principal members, including as they did the Duchess of Devonshire, the Hon. Mrs. Damer, and Mrs. Crewe, ought to have satisfied society's scruples. Colonel Greville felt the attacks made upon the club, and started a paper called *The Picnic* in its defence. The editor of this paper was W. Coombe, the author of that wearisome book *Dr. Syntax's Tour*, and it is doing no injustice to *The Picnic* to say that Coombe was not any livelier as a journalist than as an author.

The fashion started by Lady Buckinghamshire caught on, and in the first years of the nineteenth century picnics were highly popular. In the summer of 1805, when Drury Lane was closed, the proprietors of the theatre, the managers, and about fifty particular friends, had a "picnic dinner" in the Grand Saloon and the King's Room. One account informs us that "among the delicacies served up was a fine turtle dressed by Monterelli of the Albany Coffee House, and valued at £20." The name of the donor is not mentioned, but a Mr. Wilson, one of

the proprietors, "who was in the chair, with Mr. Sheridan on his right," sent "a fine fat buck." We also learn that "Mr. Mathews joined the company after dinner and amused them by several admirable imitations of Mr. Kemble, Mr. Fawcett, and other performers. His Dicky Gossip in the manner of the late Mr. Suett excited great applause and was only excelled by his description of an idiot catching flies." An idiot catching flies! The very idea suggests delightful fooling.

Another high-born, stage-struck lady was Lady Elizabeth Berkeley, who became the Margravine of Anspach. She was more successful as a dramatist than Miss Berry, and a comedy first performed by amateurs in the Town Hall, Newbury, found its way to Drury Lane, where it gained much approbation. An after-piece, *The Silver Tankard*, was also produced at the Haymarket. Angelo gives an account of her private theatricals at Brandenburg House, Hammersmith. The theatre, a temporary one, was adjacent to the dining-room, the stage was very narrow, and green baize was put up at the sides. The play, which was founded on Mrs. Sheridan's story of *Nourjahad*, was of a romantic Oriental character, and "as a grand finale, the Margrave's plate (which at Rundell's cost two thousand pounds more than that of her late Majesty Queen Charlotte, which it is said was twenty-four thousand)" was placed at the hero's feet, having a few hours before decorated the dining-table! The suppers which followed were on a regal scale, and probably compensated the audience for their patience in sitting through the performances.

Then there was the Dillettanti Theatre in Tottenham Street, which was opened on March 16, 1802, "on a plan calculated to form a point of elegant and refined concentration among the most fashionable families in the kingdom." The dovecotes of the "regular theatres" were considerably fluttered in consequence, and *The Theatrical Repertory* published a protest "from Mr. Richardson, Sheridan, etc., in



HARRIOT MELLON AS VOLANTE IN "THE HONEYMOON."

From an engraving after Sir W. Beechey.



which it was laid down that “ the number of Dramatic performances of any sort, Plays, Proverbs, etc., shall not exceed ten in the course of a season, and that no paid Performer, nor any person in any way receiving or expecting to receive remuneration, or which is a paid Performer of any of the existing theatres shall take part in the same. The Dramatic Amusements in Tottenham Street, either in French or English, shall *bona fide* be carried on by Ladies and Gentlemen.” Despite this strong protest the Dilletanti went on its way, and Drury Lane and Covent Garden Theatres remained uninjured.

The history of amateur theatricals would make an entertaining volume. In the middle of the eighteenth century working people were prohibited by law from indulging in private theatricals, which were regarded as the close preserve of the well-to-do. We find in *The British Press* of April 13, 1752, that “on advice that a set of barbers, apprentices, journeymen, staymakers, maid-servants, etc., had taken a large room in the Strand to see the tragedy of *The Orphan*, the price of admittance 1s., Mr. Justice Fielding issued his warrant to Mr. Welch, high-constable, who apprehended the actors and conducted them through the streets in their tragedy-dresses before the justice, who out of compassion to their youth, only bound them over to their good behaviour.” It will be observed that private theatricals were objected to, not because the room was unlicensed—no licence in fact was procurable—but on the score of morals.

Sixty years or so later the same forces were in operation, but it may be admitted that there was aggravation in the offence when the plays were acted on the Sabbath. One newspaper paragraph runs: “ At nine o’clock on Sunday night, Mr. Crisp, Master of a neighbouring workhouse, laid information before the magistrate at Hatton Garden, of a kind of Private Theatre in an obscure court near the Coach and Horses, Vine Street, near Clerkenwell Green,

where a number of youths of both sexes were at that moment performing a play to the corruption of their morals, and breach of the Sabbath. In consequence of this several officers repaired to the Theatre which was a kind of stable, and securing about twenty of the performers brought them before the Magistrates in their tinsel stage dresses in the characters of Kings, Queens, Magicians, etc. . . . It appeared that they were accustomed to perform two nights in the week and that the visitors were admitted by tickets for which they paid threepence each. After hearing the charge the magistrates read them a long lecture and severely reprimanded them, but on their promising not to offend in future they were all discharged." Charles Dibden waxes indignant when he writes about amateur acting, and Garrick also disliked it.

That reckless rake, Lord Barrymore, had a craze for private theatricals, which he combined with a mania for senseless practical jokes. He and his two brothers and sister were distinguished by names which stood for their several characteristics. Lord Barrymore himself was known as "Hellgate," his lame brother as "Cripplegate," the other brother, a parson, who it was said had been in every prison in England excepting one—Newgate; and this was the name bestowed upon him. The lady was called "Billingsgate," which sufficiently explains itself.

Lord Barrymore's private theatre at Wargrave was built on a very elaborate scale, and was exceedingly well appointed, accommodating an audience of about 900. Mrs. Philip Lybbe Powys speaks of his lordship and his friends performing three times a week, and tells how "cake, negus, and all kinds of wine were brought between the acts; the cake alone one night, they say, cost £20."

Lord Barrymore had also an active share in the theatrical performances in town. Miss Berry tells us how she "went to carry my niece, Sophia Walpole, home last night from her mother's, and found Little Burlington Street blocked up by coaches. Lord

Barrymore, his sister Lady Caroline, and Mrs. Goodall, the actress, were performing *The Beaux' Stratagem* in Squib's auction room, which his lordship has converted into a theatre." Some few years later, Miss Berry records that, July 23, 1798, "At nine o'clock in the evening we went to Lady Hardwicke's for their play. I went to the green-room to assist in rouging, etc. The theatre was brilliant, really the prettiest private theatre I have ever seen."

The managers of Lord Barrymore's theatre at Wargrave were Anthony Pasquin and John Edwin. Pasquin had picked up Edwin, a clever comedian, but vulgar, at what was then called a "spouting club" held at the French Horn, Cheapside. Pasquin, in his memoir of Edwin, refers to "a new spouting seminary" at the Falcon in Fetter Lane. Here Edwin at the age of sixteen made his *début*. The club was dubbed the "Theatre Royal in Fetter Lane." The plan was adopted of having "a man with a staff at the door of the room, which was meant as a measure to give an air of respectability to the diversions of the evening; the price of admission was one shilling, entitling the visitor to porter and tobacco till eleven o'clock."

The managers generally wound up the evening, after the audience had departed, with "good punch and mulled wine." The club met every Friday night, and the managers "sat alternately two at each time as Presidents, Moderators and Directors of the dramatic entertainments. They were possessed of a decent wardrobe with all the necessary appurtenances of wigs, truncheons, swords, chains, waves, thunder, lightning, etcetera, in a garret which served as a dressing-room." Wrench, a comedian of considerable ability and a great favourite during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, began, like Edwin, at a "spouting club" which had its meetings in the neighbourhood of the Tottenham Court Road.

Another club was located in Gate Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and remembering the reputation in old

times of this street and of Whetstone Park hard by, the name it took, "The Aspasian Theatre," was not ill chosen. This club, we read in *The Monthly Review* (1804), "did not hold long together, nor from any disagreement among themselves, but from the circumstance of having erected their standard under the same roof with that of the Ebenezer Chapel, separated only by a thin partition, the proprietor made his choice which to get rid of and succeeded in ejecting the sons of Thespis."

The theatricals given at Richmond House by Mrs. Damer, with the assistance of Miss Farren, in 1787, some fifteen years before Miss Mellon had anything to do with them, were described as "the only dramatic entertainment regulated by the nobility and personages of distinction that had as yet taken place." They preceeded Lord Barrymore's by some seven years and were, we take it, of a more sedate and select character. It was a great privilege to obtain a ticket of admission, and Mr. Percy Noble in his *Life of Mrs. Damer* relates how, on one occasion, when the cards bore the intimation "No one admitted after half-past seven," Pitt, who had a ticket but was unable to arrive in time, had a special concession made in his favour. Fox, who heard of this and who also had been invited, was somewhat piqued at the privilege awarded to his rival, and purposely arrived at the door at the same time. The doorkeeper, having had his instructions, allowed Pitt to enter, and barred the way to Fox, but without avail, as may be imagined.

When under the will of Horace Walpole, who died in 1797, Mrs. Damer became the owner, with certain restrictions, of Strawberry Hill, she built a private theatre, and here possibly Harriot Mellon performed in Miss Berry's comedy *Fashionable Friends*.

Frederick Reynolds, on his return from Switzerland at this period, found the whole town infected with the mania, and "Drury Lane and Covent Garden were almost forgotten in the performances at Rich-

mond House." He adds that the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough, imitating and emulating the example of the Duke of Richmond, erected a splendid theatre at Blenheim with the intention of there "producing a theatrical representation which should totally eclipse all previous attempts."

Reynolds, visiting his friend Holman the actor, who was keeping his terms at Oxford, secured a couple of tickets to see *False Delicacy* and *Who's the Dupe?* performed by noble lords and ladies. Reynolds does not seem to have been particularly impressed, and, "being unable to hear one line out of twenty which these *really private* actors uttered, expressed a wish" to Miles Peter Andrews, a rich amateur dramatist and writer of prologues who sat next him, "that some friendly person would hint to them that the entertainment of their audience would not be diminished if they would condescend to speak audibly." Andrews, who had previously given his opinion that the acting was "Tiresome, fusty stuff, sir," burst out with "I wish quite the contrary, my dear sir! quite the contrary! If you knew anything of the matter, sir, you would be aware that *not to hear them* is our only chance of getting through this tiresome evening."

Thanks to the unexpected, however, the evening could not have been so very tiresome, for one of the Duke's suite, anxious over the refreshments which were served between the acts, hearing a clatter among the audience while the play was proceeding, and thinking to further his Grace's hospitality, suddenly addressed the noble performers with the announcement, "Stop—some of the company want more tea!" Then, turning to the audience, he added, "Ladies and gentlemen, you shall be served immediately," and refreshments were again supplied. The affair concluded with a dance and a supper, of which latter the three theatrical gentlemen—owing to Andrews's blunt criticism, to which he freely gave utterance—were not asked to partake.

Edward Stirling, at the beginning of the nineteenth century—he was then only a lad of fourteen—played at a little theatre in Rawsterne Street, Goswell Street. Here, he says, the amateurs had to pay to act, and Samuel Phelps was among the number. “Prices ran high for Shakesperian heroes. Thirty shillings enabled the fortunate possessor to strut and feel his power as Othello or Macbeth. Fifteen shillings was the price paid for the Thane of Fife. Malcolm went at seven.” Another theatre was “The Temple of Arts” in Catherine Street, Strand. As might be expected, much lower prices were asked at the Brown Bear, Goodman’s Fields, where the landlord, one Ikey Solomons, converted a dirty club-room into a wretched apology for a theatre. Here one could play Lord Lovell in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* for two-and-sixpence, dress included.

While the members of the Upper Ten were reveling in the frivolities of the Picnic Society, it is interesting to note that many of the entertainments put before the middle classes were tinged with severity and science. There was the Eidouranion at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, a mysterious machine the nature of which *The Monthly Mirror* for February 1800, in its notice, does not explain; the Naumachia in Silver Street, Fleet Street—apparently some kind of dissolving views, but again the *Mirror* is vague; and the Eidophusicon in Panton Street, Haymarket—this was unmistakably dissolving views picturing an eclipse of the moon enlivened by comic songs!

There was a rage for Greek derivatives. Maillardet’s Exhibition in Spring Gardens was an exception, but as the show consisted of “the figure of a child and a foreign insect” the inventor probably had some difficulty in finding a Greek term to fit the case. Cartwright’s Musical Glasses and Philosophical Fireworks at the Lyceum combined with the Storming of Seringapatam—one of Sir Robert Ker Porter’s acres of canvas—and Miss Thompson’s Exhibition of Pictures

in Wool complete the list of "instructive" entertainments with which the public were deluged.

Besides coaching Mrs. Damer's friends, Harriot at this time had other engagements with amateur companies, and it is recorded that she was a great favourite with the Kentish Bownien's Lodge at Dartford Heath, apparently a club for the practice of archery, a fashionable amusement which reached its zenith some twenty years later. Provincial engagements gave her plenty of occupation, and she played in the summertime at Liverpool and at Cheltenham, and her hosts of friends enabled her to realise considerable sums at her various benefits. Indeed, the country theatres paid her better than Drury Lane, where the salaries, save those of the "stars," were based on a meagre scale.

There was, apparently, a spirit of economy, not to say cheese-paring, in the management of Drury Lane which compared unfavourably with the old times. Thus when Mrs. Crouch met with a carriage accident and injured her face her disfigurement was promptly met by reducing her salary to one-half! It would look as if the responsibility for reducing expenses must be fixed on Kemble if *How do You do?* was justified in writing, when he took over the reins of power, that "we believe there is not a man, woman, or child in Drury Lane company who rejoices in the change of management. It is not our wish to lessen the merits of Mr. Kemble, but so happy do we feel at the happiness of others that we cannot avoid observing the contrast."

## CHAPTER XII

The bygone "green-room"—Its strict etiquette—Harriot's success as Volante in *The Honeymoon*—She meets Mr. Coutts at Cheltenham—He subscribes to her "benefit"—Harriot not flirtatious—Her one love affair—Thomas Coutts—His sturdy independence—His business relations with royalty.

HARRIOT in 1804 had been at Drury Lane some nine years, and though the remuneration was small, against that must be set the opportunities for distinction which now and again fell in her way. It was certainly a triumph when she was considered good enough to replace Mrs. Jordan as Nell in the ever-green *Devil to Pay*. Here she had the advantage of acting with Bannister, whose vivacity stimulated her to throw off a certain suspicion of inertness which was her chief drawback.

The notices which appeared in *The Dramatic Censor* were anything but discouraging. One runs: "Miss Mellon has appeared this season as the successor of Mrs. Jordan in the lower walks of comedy. Her Estifania, though an avowed copy of her predecessor, is, notwithstanding, entitled to commendation." Again, "Miss Mellon's Lydia Languish, like most of her parts in this line, is a copy of Mrs. Jordan's style of acting. But in making this remark we should be sorry to discourage this actress, who certainly possesses no mean comic powers." Later on the critic remarks: "Miss Mellon displays much archness and native humour, and gains, as she deserves, considerably upon the public favour, though some of the newspapers affect to carp at her because she is not Mrs. Jordan. She is a young and improving actress."

Of course it was against her that she had not had a chance of fluttering her own wings, but this was to

come when Tobin's comedy *The Honeymoon*, after some vicissitudes, was submitted to the judgment of the green-room. Theatrical routine changes slowly, but of late years many innovations have crept in, and could the old actors visit a modern theatre nothing would astound them more than the vanishing of the green-room. The green-room was a power in days gone by. It was regarded affectionately by the profession, and was the object of intense curiosity to the outside public. To the latter it meant mystery, romance, intrigue, a sort of spider's web where pretty actresses were the prey of the dissolute rich who had the privilege of the *entrée*. It was, of course, nothing of the kind. At Drury Lane and Covent Garden there was the first green-room sacred to the leading actors and actresses, the second green-room for those of minor rank and the chorus, besides a room for the supers.

Mr. Planché describes the green-room in his boyish days as one of the most delightful resorts in London. Wits and literary men there congregated, and the strictest etiquette and propriety were observed. No visitor was allowed to enter who was not in full evening dress. Even the actors were excluded if in boots, unless when dressed for the stage. The principal ladies "had each her page waiting in the corridor to pick up her train as she issued from the green-room and bear it to the wing or other part of her entrance on the stage."

But outside the theatre and among the lower grades the profession in those days must have represented as motley a gathering as that with which Falstaff refused to march through Coventry. Ryley has drawn a vivid picture of the "mummers" of 1802. Ryley was one of a too numerous class of actors—always unlucky, always with a grievance, and mostly out at elbows. In temperament he was the reverse of Alfred Jingle, Esq., and Mathews called him the "Trist" because of his general characteristics of gloom.

In his autobiography, which he called *The Itinerant*, Ryley describes a certain hostelry close to Drury Lane Theatre, where would assemble "in Passion Week all the managers who want people and all the actors who want employment. . . . One evening I sauntered into a room at the O.P. and P.S., their usual rendezvous, where I met with a motley group of at least fifty of both descriptions, and a curious assemblage it was. . . . There were managers of first, second, and third rates; first those dignified personages who govern theatres royal, next those who provide new theatres by licence, and lastly the humble purveyors for public amusement, whose ambition soars not beyond that appendage to agriculture, a *barn*. The actors were not less diversified than the managers. Some were dressed in the first style of fashion and others barely clean and decent, and a third class neither one nor the other. It was curious to observe the different characters of countenance exhibited by those who had made engagements to their satisfaction, and others who dispaired of making any. The pompous declamation of the former, who with hat askew and neckcloth nostril high, ever and anon applied a small switch to a shining Hessian boot with a self-approving smile which seemed to say 'Am I not the boy for a benefit?' which, contrasted with the other, formed a lively picture of hope and despair. Instead of the heart-stirring vinous juice drunk by the successful candidate, one humble half-pint of porter frothy in shining pewter was the substitute."

The fortunate actors who plumed themselves on obtaining an engagement would not exhibit much restraint when admitted to the green-room, and especially when a new play was under discussion. To-day the manager decides for himself; it was hardly so when *The Honeymoon* was submitted to the Drury Lane authorities. At first the play was rejected, a fate it had met with at Covent Garden; but throughout the Drury Lane stage-manager was

in its favour and read it to the company assembled in the green-room. Bannister, who could see no shining part for himself, was unable to make up his mind, Harriot Mellon, Elliston, and Miss Duncan were in its favour, the others were doubtful. Mrs. Jordan, who was not present, read the play privately, and weighed the chances of success in Volante against those in Juliana. She feared that, whichever she chose, she might find herself overweighted by the actress who took the other—as a matter of fact Miss Duncan was running her very close, and with all the advantage of youth and beauty—and she determined to have nothing to do with either.

It was a fortunate decision, for Harriot played Volante. The part was exactly suited to her powers and she at last established herself in the eyes of the public as an attraction to which heretofore they had in some unaccountable fashion been blind. “Her benefit during the height of this excitement,” Mrs. Baron-Wilson writes, “was crowned with extraordinary success. It was quite a point among theatrical amateurs to send a handsome tribute of their admiration for Volante in exchange for a ticket.” This pleasant method of patronage has long since passed away, but so has the benefit system—much to the advantage of the profession and its supporters all round.

The ardent desire of most people in those days when they were unable to earn their living at their own profession, and sometimes when they were, was to obtain a “post” which brought in an income without doing anything for it. Sinecures abounded. Members of Parliament and others who had “interest” were pestered. People were thrown into positions for which they were totally unsuited, and the public paid. Harriot’s new-born fame brought her into contact with Colonel MacMahon, the Prince of Wales’s “jackal,” whose character will be found luridly described by Robert Huish in his *Memoirs of George IV.*, and it was only in the nature of things

that she should ask for a "post" for her stepfather, Entwistle; and MacMahon, who, personally might not have been a bad fellow, pitchforked him into the position of postmaster at Cheltenham. That Entwistle, who was a fiddler and had no other accomplishment beyond a capacity for indulging in the genial glass, knew nothing about postal work, and was utterly incapable of performing the duties satisfactorily, was nothing, nor did it matter in the least how the public suffered. Entwistle was disposed of, Harriot was able to get her mother—who had always been a trial and a trouble—off her hands, and the world was beginning to go merrily for her.

But the outcome of this Cheltenham "job" as it would be called to-day—a century ago such things were so common nobody wondered—was something totally unexpected. While Harriot, staying there with her mother, was fulfilling an engagement at the Cheltenham Theatre an "old, pallid, sickly thin gentleman in a shabby coat and brown seratch wig" was "taking the waters" at the fashionable resort. Mrs. Entwistle as the wife of the postmaster knew all the gossip of the place, and soon discovered that this old gentleman, notwithstanding his poverty-stricken appearance, was regarded, from what his servant had let fall, as one of the richest men in London, and decided when Harriot took her benefit that she would ask him to subscribe for a box. She wrote him the usual respectful letter, but no answer came for some time, and in the meantime Harriot and a girl friend who now lived with her in Little Russell Street, met the identical old gentleman in the Long Walk. He recognised the young actress, reminding her that they had met at Drury Lane Theatre green-room, and, before taking leave, told her he had sent his answer to Mrs. Entwistle's application. Sure enough, when Harriot returned home, she found her mother in ecstasies over a letter from Mr. Coutts, who had enclosed five guineas for a box.

According to Mrs. Baron-Wilson, Harriot always

refused to part with these her “‘first five golden guineas.’ . . . They happened to be guineas just fresh from the Mint ; and she put the bright coins apart in a separate purse, often showing them to those who knew the circumstances ; and she frequently endured temporary privations rather than change any portion of her ‘lucky money,’ the only thing she was ever known to refuse to her mother’s rapacity. On the day of her marriage with Mr. Coutts she produced the well-known purse with its glittering contents, and twelve years afterwards its faded glories were again shown to a bridal party when she became a duchess.”

It is hard to find any romance in this if it be true, which we doubt, but indeed romance does not seem to have been part of Harriot’s nature. She had a strain of superstition, yet withal was level-headed. It must be confessed that the lack of evidence showing that beneath her invariable good humour and sunny smiles there were hidden deep feeling and tenderness somewhat lessens one’s interest in Harriot Mellon. She certainly does not appear to have possessed that susceptibility which is part of woman’s fascination even when it amounts to weakness.

The history of an actress of the stage, and more especially of an actress in the days of the green-room, is generally taken up with her love affairs, but the private life of Harriot Mellon is singularly barren in this respect. We hear of no flirtations ; apparently she had the art of keeping men at a distance, for her admirers—and it is hard to think she had not many—were amazingly undemonstrative, and all that Mrs. Baron-Wilson has to say on the subject is a very prosaic and uninteresting story of “a gentleman named Barry . . . possessing considerable advantages of appearance and manner.” On Mr. Barry showing that he was unmistakably in love, Mrs. Entwistle promptly interfered, not so much with the idea of ascertaining the gentleman’s intentions as of finding out “his means of supporting Harriot, whose

prospects he would destroy in taking her off the stage." The "gentleman" turned out a fraud, as Harriot discovered; he was given his *congé*, and her one romance was at an end. According to her biographer "this circumstance apparently seared her heart against risking that 'fatal dream again,' for all who knew her unite in saying she never afterwards showed the least preference for any one of her admirers."

We must confess to a certain amount of scepticism concerning this "searing of hearts," and love's "fatal dream" in connection with Harriot Mellon. *The Gentleman's Magazine*, we fancy, was much nearer the truth when it applied Byron's lines to her as :

" Being rather large and languishing and lazy  
Yet of a beauty that would drive you crazy."

The circumstances of her two marriages are totally opposed to the tenderness of romantic sentiment. It is hard to assign to them any motive other than self-glory. Her first husband was double her age and almost tottering into his grave—she married him for his money. Her second husband was half her age—she married him for his rank. One cannot get away from the facts nor from the conclusion that after quitting the stage her story is one of the worship of gold—that she flung it about lavishly does not alter the position.

Mr. Coutts probably had no illusions over Harriot Mellon. He had been mixed up with money all his life, and he certainly did not care a rap for what money could buy. His tastes were simple, and luxury did not attract him. Nor did society. He knew too much about it—from the inside. Rank did not disturb his independence. When Queen Charlotte, offended at the polities of his son-in-law, Sir Francis Burdett, sent notice that she should withdraw her account (it was but a small one) the sturdy old man assured Her Majesty that in order to withdraw half a million of money from the banking house

of Thomas Coutts & Co. only three *hours* were necessary, and the Queen thought better of her request.

A different version of what appears to be the same incident is given, but with King George and not Queen Charlotte as the chief actor. Mr. Coutts, we are told, had advanced £100,000 to his son-in-law, Sir Francis Burdett, towards his expenses of his election for Westminster. On the King hearing of this he withdrew his account, placed it in the hands of a banker in Windsor, who shortly afterwards suspended payment, and the money was lost. Elections were expensive affairs in those days, but £100,000 is altogether outside the mark. If the royal family were angry with Burdett it would have been after his imprisonment in the Tower, in consequence of his support of public liberties, and at that time the King was hopelessly insane. The threat to withdraw the account has a savour of Queen Charlotte's pettiness about it.

The story of the introduction of Thomas Coutts to the King is very likely to be true, as it is an example of the courage and enterprise of a shrewd business man. It is said that in the early part of his career, Mr. Coutts was in the habit of frequently asking the heads of the various London banking houses to dinner. On one occasion the manager of a city bank let out that a certain nobleman had applied to his house for a loan of £30,000 and had been refused. Coutts said nothing, but directly his guests had retired, he sent a message to the nobleman in question to the effect that if he called at the bank the next morning he could have what he required. When his lordship appeared the banker placed in his hands "thirty one-thousand pound notes and refused to take any more security than a note of hand. So pleased was the nobleman that he recommended Thomas Coutts to his friends and told the incident to the King, who became, in consequence, one of the patrons of the bank." *Se non è vero, è ben trovato.*

He was banker not only to the King and Queen, but also to the woman Charlotte detested—Princess Caroline of Wales. The Princess, however, on a difference with Mr. Coutts, *did* withdraw her account. Theodore Hook alludes to it in one of his *John Bull* effusions, “Mrs. Muggins’ visit to the Queen,” written in the rhythm of the tune, “Have you been to Abingdon ?” The stanza runs :

“ And has she a *banking-house*—heigh, ma’am ; ho, ma’am ?  
Has she a banking-house ho ?  
—When Coutts was unhandsome  
She shifted to Ransom,  
To whom she does nothing but owe—owe,  
To whom she does nothing but owe.”

Though he was daily associated with rich people, Thomas Coutts was one of the most shabbily dressed men in the city, and he scorned the adulation which wealth brings. His personal comfort was all that he cared for ; he had come down to the bedrock of his wants, and as he was situated even these, despite his riches, could not be supplied. His wife was a hopeless invalid, his daughters were well married into high families, and had their own pursuits and pleasures ; he was at the mercy of servants whom he was ill fitted to control. He was a lonely old man when he was captivated by Harriot’s exuberant charms, and in the mood to be influenced by a woman’s amiability and unvarying good-humour.

Harriot at this time was in the plenitude of her charms, and her experience had been of a world where one learns much. Mrs. Baron-Wilson sums up the position which came about when Mr. Coutts followed her and her daughter to town as one initiated by Mrs. Entwistle, who, she thinks, had “ marked him for her daughter’s husband.” It may have been so, especially with the example of Miss Farren and Lord Derby fresh in her mind. It is not so easy to decide what Harriot’s views on the matter were. At any rate the footing of what may be termed an affectionate



THOMAS COUTTS.  
From a contemporary print.



friendship was soon established, and any doubt as to how the rich banker regarded the actress was set at rest by Harriot's speedy introduction to the three daughters of Mr. Coutts, the Marchioness of Bute, the Countess of Guilford, and Lady Burdett, the wife of Sir Francis Burdett—at least this is how her biographer represents it. But one cannot avoid being cautious in accepting the lady's partial statement of the case.

Without attempting undue flattery, which the business-like old gentleman would have resented, the little acts of attention which women, and especially Irishwomen, knew so well how to render, must have been highly acceptable to the banker. No. 17, Little Russell Street was a convenient house of call after his hours at the bank in the Strand, and it is quite natural to be told that "in time he regularly took his luncheon in Little Russell Street at two, and if his family wanted to see him they knew where to go."

As to any "arrangement" in regard to the future we can only quote Mrs. Baron-Wilson, who writes: "A legal gentleman long in the busy world has assured the writer that there existed a bond between Mr. Coutts and Miss Mellon, that if she would remain unmarried while his invalid wife survived he would marry her whenever his hand was free to offer." This may be so. What Mrs. Papiendieck said of Miss Farren and Lord Derby certainly furnishes a precedent.

## CHAPTER XIII

Harriot and Master Betty—The infant prodigy craze—Harriot's letter of protest—Charles Lamb's farce *Mr. H.*—Harriot plays the leading part—The piece damned—More failures—The “Lottery prize” sensation—Conflicting versions—Wewitzer's story and the alleged neglect of him by the Duchess of St. Albans—The burning of Covent Garden Theatre—Mrs. Baron-Wilson's story of Harriot's exertions at the fire—The curious tale of the diamond necklace.

BY the year 1805, Harriot Mellon found herself well on the way to becoming a stage celebrity. The hallmark of popularity had been set by the publication of her portrait in the form of a coloured print, and a few months later a second representing her as the Comic Muse—a picture over which Mrs. Entwistle in her incessant anxiety concerning Harriot and propriety professed to be greatly shocked (see p. 96). During this year, however, she had not much chance of adding to her reputation as an actress. The Master Betty craze dominated everything, and to show, we presume, that the boy was as marvellous in comedy as in tragedy *Miss in her Teens* was put on (May 17, 1806), in which Harriot played Miss Biddy to his Captain Flash, the occasion being the benefit of the young Roscius.

The mania for infant prodigies had spread all over the country. It was carried to the height of absurdity. Some five and thirty years before the taste was in the opposite direction, and Holcroft relates that when Roger Kemble brought forward his little daughter Sarah as a juvenile phenomenon the country audience burst into shouts and hisses. But in 1805 for the first night of Master Betty at Covent Garden twenty guineas were offered in vain for a box, and ten guineas for the reversion of any box on the

second night met with no acceptance. "For single seats in the pit," records *The Sun*, "five guineas have been offered, and seats in front of the First Gallery would be gladly purchased by some thousands for three guineas each." How the House of Commons adjourned to permit its members to witness the performance is an oft-told tale, while during an illness bulletins of the state of the prodigy's health were published as though he were a royal personage. There was no limit to the rage, and, according to *The Theatrical Recorder*, "managers were overwhelmed with letters: hundreds are said to have been received from parents who every one have a young Roscius only wanting to be known to be adored."

Another "phenomenon" was a Miss Fisher who appeared at Drury Lane as Little Pickle, and of whom *The Monthly Review* said: "We scarcely know which of the two parties is most to blame, the public who encourage and applaud the abortive attempts of these little eye-asses, or the conductors of the British stage who suffer such a prostitution of its valuable uses."

Apropos of Miss Fisher a letter purporting to have been written by Harriot Mellon will be found (with others) in one of the many so-called "biographies" flung upon the town between 1814 and 1822, when anything relating to Mr. Coutts and herself was eagerly devoured. This biography, entitled *Fine Acting, or A Sketch of the Life of the late Miss H. M—— of Drury Lane Theatre, and of T. C——, Esq., Banker*, is free from the scurrilities of Mr. Percy Wyndham's *Strictures on an Imposter and Old Actress, Formerly Bet the Pot Girl, alias the Banker's Sham Widow*, and is compiled with some literary ability. The author, no doubt, coloured the various incidents to suit the market, and as it was the fashion—for reasons difficult nowadays to comprehend—to attack Miss Mellon, he is not very scrupulous in twisting every episode concerning her to her disadvantage. There is, however, nothing objectionable

in the letters, and they are probably authentic. The one relating to Miss Fisher runs thus :

“ MY DEAR SIR,—I think it is ordained I am ever to be tormented—the worthy managers of this theatre have played me a pretty trick ! but you shall judge—you know, I believe, I had relinquished my engagement here (Cheltenham) ; but in consequence of a most pressing letter saying what a heavy loss it would be to the theatre if I did not come, I consented, and sent word what time to expect me. On my arrival guess my surprise, I found Miss Fisher by the name of the *celebrated Roscia* playing and absolutely engaged for my nights. When I demanded a reason for such behaviour they had the assurance to say—thinking I did not intend to act anywhere—it would make no great difference if I commenced my engagement a fortnight later. Now what do you think of this ? It has been a complete juggle between two parties to keep me here all the summer. My own family knowing nothing of my Liverpool business, finding I will not stay longer than a certain time, I am offered my own terms to play four or five nights. Was they to give me a hundred per night I would not disgrace myself by performing with such a set.”

The shaky grammar and the haziness of the letter in parts suggest a passion, and this would be quite characteristic of Harriot Mellon.

Nothing in the way of prodigies was too absurd for the public to swallow, and the newspapers of the period abound with evidence of the craze. “ The juvenile Roseius whom Mrs. Jordan has brought forward at Richmond is a Master Tokeley of Drury Lane Theatre, a very promising boy.” “ The Infant Billington closed two engagements at the York Theatre on Friday evening last.” “ Master Wigley, aged 4½ years, played some time on the bugle horn.”

The parents of a precocious little girl of seven persuaded the Drury Lane management to bring her

out, and crowds assembled at Covent Garden on November 23, 1823, to see her play *Peggy* in *The Country Girl*. The absurdity of a child acting in such a play was manifest. Hisses and other signs of disapprobation were heard in the second act, they increased in the third, and in the fourth the play could not proceed, whereupon the child, with the utmost assurance, advanced to the front and thus addressed the audience: "Ladies and gentlemen, I have done nothing to offend the company sent here to hiss me, and I hope you'll turn 'em out." This only increased the tumult. Kemble, full of apologies, asked that Miss Mudie might be allowed to finish, and she was permitted to say a few lines, but after these the audience would hear no more and she retired. Miss Searle tried to continue in her place, but the Mudie-ites would have none of her, and the war of partisans went on with such pleasant provocatives as "Silence that fool in the boxes!" inviting the retort, "Silence that ass in the pit." The uproar finished little Miss Mudie, and nothing more was heard of her.

What was expected to be a notable event in stage history, namely the production of a farce from the pen of the "gentle Elia," proved a frost. Lamb chose his own cast, he liked Harriot Mellon's acting and he selected her for the leading lady, Melisinda; Elliston playing the title rôle of the piece, *Mr. H.* Lamb hoped much from his dramatic effort. Mary Lamb carried the MS. to the theatre, and Wroughton, the acting manager, received her very civilly. The day before, Lamb had written to Hazlitt: "The firstfruits of my retirement has now been a farce which goes to manager to-morrow. *Wish my ticket luck.* God bless you and do write. Yours *fumosissimus*, C. Lamb."

Lamb had never been able to get his tragedy *John Woodville* accepted, and when the curtain drew up on the farce on the night of December 10, 1806, his theatrical ambitions were realised. He and

Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson sat in the front row, and when Elliston had delivered the prologue amid loud applause all seemed to be going well. But the thinness of the plot, the long-drawn-out dialogue, the waning of the curiosity at first excited as to the meaning of the name *Mr. H.*, and the lame and impotent conclusion—only Hogsflesh and nothing more!—proved too much for the patience of the audiencee, and the piecee was thoroughly damned, Lamb joining in the unanimous hissing and hooting; but his gentle sister who sat beside him, we doubt not, with tears in her eyes. Notwithstanding the confident announcement on the playbill of the following day that “the new farce of *Mr. H.* performed for the first time last night was received by an overflowing audience with universal applause and will be repeated for the second time to-morrow,” its fate was sealed and its first night was its last.

Years after, in his essay “On the custom of hissing at the Theatres,” Lamb deseribed what we believe must have been his real feelings on this luckless venture. “I shall never forget the sounds on *my night*. I never before that time fully felt the reception which the Author of *All Ill in the Paradise Lost* meets with from the crities in the *pit* at the final close of his ‘Tragedy upon the Human Race.’ . . .

‘Dreadful was the din  
Of hissing through the hall. . . .’

“For *hall* substitute *theatre* and you have the very image of what takes place at what is called the *damnation* of a piece—and properly so-called; for here you see its origin plainly, whence the custom was derived and what the first piecee was that so suffered.”

Harriot’s run of ill-luck in the way of new plays and original characters pursued her. After the failure of *Mr. H.* came a play by Andrew Cherry, a remarkably clever comedian, who never reached the position his talents justified him in filling. Cherry

was unlucky in coming out at a time when Quick, Suett, Bannister, Fawcett, Munden, Knight, and Emery held the field. His want of stature was also against him. His play *A Day in London*, in which Harriot had a good part, ran for three nights and was not heard of again.

Henry Siddons, the son of Mrs. Siddons, tried his hand at a piece, *Time's a Telltale*, in which Harriot played the leading part. It was produced on October 27, 1807, with an epilogue by Lamb, and its first performance revealed defects which the author tried subsequently to remedy. *The Monthly Mirror* was severe in its criticism, remarking that "The epilogue, written by Mr. Lamb of the India House, which supposes the comet approaching and making Bond Street too hot for the loungers, was both in rhyme and reason superlatively lame and silly." Of Harriot the critic says: "The part of Lady Delmar was very useful for Miss Mellon, who, though she has at present a family look, is only seen to advantage in ladies' maids." On the second night, Lamb withdrew his first epilogue and substituted a new one, and considerable alterations were made in Miss Mellon's part. The play ran nine nights.

On June 2 another new play, *Something to Do*, was produced with Mrs. Jordan, Miss Mellon, Elliston, Mathews, Dowton, and H. Johnstone, and was, to use Genest's terse expression, "damned." Drury Lane, in its season of 1806-7, was particularly unlucky, its list of failures comprising two tragedies, four comedies, one opera, and three farces.

The test of dramatic fame, from the public point of view, appears to lie not so much in what actors and actresses say *on* the stage as in what they do off it. Harriot at this time was a personage of sufficient importance to be paragraphed after the manner of the day. *The Monthly Review* of November, 1807, remarks: "In *The British Press* of the 23rd of November, we have an acrostic to Miss Mellon, signed C. R. Sheridan. Who is this Mr. Sheridan? He begins

‘Mine be the Maid’—where did he get his intelligence? He ends :

‘Who reared in Nature’s school,  
Nature has taught to feel without a rule.’

Where did he get his grammar?’’ *The Monthly Mirror* a short time before had no doubt pleased its readers by delicately observing: “An apology was made for Miss Mellon’s not playing Harriet in *The Jealous Wife* on the 14th. By a *faux pas* which she could not avoid she had sprained her ankle.” From the same source we learn in November 1807: “Miss Mellon is about to try the benefit of the country air and exercise. She has lately been treating for a little estate at Eversham, valued at four thousand six hundred pounds. Mr. Wewitzer, who is very fond of hock and who *quoad HOC* thinks Miss Mellon exceedingly agreeable, enacts the part of agent in these delicate concerns.” Wewitzer (famous for his puns, and very bad ones they were) was one of Harriot’s most trusted friends, and we shall have occasion to mention him again.

Despite the fact that Harriot Mellon had been to a certain extent supplanted by Miss Duncan, they were excellent friends. “Miss Mellon and Miss Duncan are called The Incorruptibles,” says a quippish paragraphist. “Seven lovers have lately miscarried in attempting to draw them to the Temple of Hymen.” Mrs. Jordan’s absences from the stage, owing to causes readily understood, gave occasion to James Smith perpetrating the following *apropos* of Miss Duncan, the play in the last line being, of course, an allusion to Mrs. Jordan’s favourite character in *The Devil to Pay*.

“When Jordan, foremost of Thalia’s train,  
Slept in the straw awhile in Drury Lane,  
Duncan, the novice, seized the chair of state  
And play’d the Cobbler’s metamorphosed mate;  
But soon to health restored by Warren’s art  
Thalia’s favourite reassumed the part;



MASTER H. W. BETTY.  
From a contemporary print.



MRS. POWELL AS MATILDA IN "THE CURFEW."  
From an engraving by Chesebrough, after Sharp.



When lo ! a galley wag (one Arthur Page),  
Who heard the glad announcement from the stage,  
Gave the fair substitute this loud farewell—  
‘ Hear it not, Duncan, for it is a Nell.’ ”

It was not long before Harriot’s association with “the richest man in London” began to attract attention. *The Satirist* saw plenty of material in it for the spicy matter which its readers expected. Referring on September 17, 1808, to a performance of *The Country Girl*, after remarking that Mrs. Jordan had outgrown the part of Peggy, it went on to say : “ Of the other female character we shall only observe that it was meant for a gentlewoman and that it was played by Miss Mellon. Nothing need be added for it is as impossible for an owl to fly in the face of the sun as it is for Miss Mellon to look anything but a Sunday dressed cook or a bouncing barmaid at fair time ; and we were sorry to hear the managers had the cruelty to send for her from Cheltenham (whither she went in a travelling chariot and four) to enact a part which she could neither speak, look, nor understand. Her faults formerly were natural ; wilful carelessness is now added to them, and since she has obtained a *prize in the lottery*, the stage is looked upon as a *secondary* object, and rather used as an *ostensible* than a *necessary* profession.”

There was a double dose of venom in the allusion to a “prize in the lottery.” It was intended to refer not only to the treasure Harriot had secured in the banker, but also to a prize which, it was asserted, she had won in a State lottery, but to the story of which no credence was given in certain quarters. Mrs. Baron-Wilson tells how Hewitzer bought a lottery ticket for Miss Mellon, and how, with her phenomenal good luck, she found she had drawn a prize of £5,000. Out of her winnings she sent £100 each to the Drury Lane and Covent Garden Benevolent Funds, and the malicious could not believe that the money was hers, but spread the report about that it was given her by Mr. Coutts.

Wewitzer, according to Mrs. Baron-Wilson, was able to prove the falsity of the rumour, but tongues continued to wag.

The "biographies" a few years later raked up the episode, the malignant scribblers twisted it this way and that, and magnified it into a scandal of huge proportions. The author of *Fine Acting* put the amount at £10,000, and said that the donor was the printer of a certain newspaper. The matter was mentioned at a party at which Miss Mellon was present, and "she contradicted the assertion by producing a banknote for £1,000 which was handed round for inspection." "It was not intended that the public should know this," continues the author, "but the secret got out in the following manner. By whatever means she got possession of a large sum of money she sent £100 to the Theatrical Fund for the performers of each theatre, with a strict injunction not to make the circumstance known: these people disobeyed the injunction with a view, as they said, to stimulate other performers who were better able to give by publishing how bountiful Miss Mellon had been.

"The effect did not answer their expectations, though it excited the cupidity of certain editors of newspapers who were in the habit of levying contributions upon every public character; they resolved that if she had obtained ten thousand pounds they would have handsome fees out of it, or they would effectually damn her reputation: to effect this they plainly asserted that the story of the lottery ticket was false, and broadly insinuated that whatever she possessed she obtained by an intrigue with Lord G.

"What nobleman was designated by that letter it was never known, but in all probability they found that their assertion could not be supported, for the name was not repeated; but in a few days the insinuations were that the intrigue was with Mr. C——: the object of these people certainly was to obtain hush money, which Mr. C—— was well able to pay . . . but, right or wrong, he determined on resistance."

The writer then at considerable length goes into the details of negotiations, of consultations with solicitors, of threatened actions at Court, all ending in nothing, together with a few broad hints on editors being bribed into silence and at society ladies turning their backs upon Miss Mellon.

The most circumstantial account of the affair is, however, contained in a curious statement in *The Age* of October 9, 1836, under the heading of "Posthumus Papers of the late Ralph Wewitzer, comedian," contributed by an anonymous correspondent, but who probably was Charles Molloy Westmacott, the editor. In this statement we are told that Wewitzer, for some few years previous to his decease, "age and infirmity had prevented his appearing professionally before the public. In a state of the greatest indigence, the directors of Covent Garden Theatrical Fund overcame a considerable difficulty (occasioned by his neglecting to complete his payments), in admitting him an annuitant, and on the scanty pittance derived from that fund, unassisted by either of his wealthy sisters, did he continue to drag on a wearisome existence to the end.

"It was during the period of his last confinement, that, hearing of his distress . . . I sought out the residence of Wewitzer (a miserable lodging in Wild Court, Drury Lane), when, perceiving his forlorn state . . . my first enquiry was had any application been made to the Banker's Widow, to his once *dear friend*. . . . 'Alas ! sir,' said the sinking man, 'her heart is steeled against me, and the liveried lacqueys that surround her have received instructions to shut out my just complaints. . . .'

"'Surely there must be some serious cause for this unaccountable conduct; the disclosure of confidential secrets, or some act of personal offence ?'

"'None,' was the reply, 'none, sir; the wind is changed and her turned with it, or rather, when she changed her name she determined upon exchanging no more civilities with old friends. The well-planned

tale of the *Lottery Ticket* had all been developed by a mad wag of a comedian, who, under pretence of having bet a considerable wager on the lady's veracity, requested her to furnish him with the number of the prize: the question was considered a very rude one; the fortunate fair pouted and pretended forgetfulness, while the whole of the green-room, having thus become suddenly enlightened, from that moment laughed heartily at the *ingenious deception*. It was to this unfortunate discovery more than any other cause that I imagine my offence to have arisen, although in the detection of the ruse I was perfectly 'innocent.'"

In a footnote the writer says his belief was that Rae the comedian was the "mad wag" in question. He adds that "there has been another reason assigned for the neglect of poor Wewitzer experienced in the quarter alluded to, namely, that in publishing his Theatrical Calendar . . . he unintentionally gave serious offence by inserting the correct period of the Widow's *entrée* (1795) at Drury Lane, and thus furnishing a printed authority by which a clue could be at any time obtained to the age of the lady. . . . Wewitzer died a few days after the interview. He was buried in Bunhill Fields burying-ground."

Whatever may be the real facts of the lottery prize, there is no doubt that Wewitzer died in extreme penury, and the end of the comedian does not consort well with the supposed generosity of the Duchess towards him. Westmacott's story as to how Harriot at this period was able to live in luxury will be found elsewhere.\*

The reproduction in these pages of the stories told to the discredit of Miss Mellon must not be taken to suggest a belief in them. One fact tells against a ready acceptance of their authenticity—the shameful venality of a certain section of the press at this period. That bribery and blackmail belonged to the stock in trade of too many newspapers is very

\* See Appendix.

evident by a passage in one of Brougham's letters (1813) to Creevey which tells of Colonel McMahon attempting to "bribe and then bully the editor of *The Star* (which is greatly in the Princess's interest). McMahon offered to pay for a paragraph against her, and, after talking to the printers, gave them two guineas for drink."

At the moment when Miss Mellon's lottery prize was being talked about, the great scandal of the day was the selling of Army commissions by the notorious Mary Ann Clarke, a scandal which led to the resignation of the Duke of York (under whose protection the lady was) as Commander-in-Chief. With wholesale bribery going on in high places no wonder the smaller were open to similar temptations. The curious thing was, that while statements of the most shameless nature, affecting the characters and reputations of well-known people were constantly being published, no one troubled about actions for libel, and unscrupulous scribblers traded upon the reluctance of the victims to punish their traducers.

On September 20, 1808, Covent Garden was burnt down, and the fire was attended by a terrible loss of life, caused by the walls falling in and burying several persons. Mrs. Baron-Wilson waxes eloquent over Miss Mellon's exertions in the work of rescue. "At the door of the bookseller's shop was placed a large barrel of ale ordered by Miss Mellon, from which the labourers were supplied by her directions. In the drawing-room window above stood Miss Mellon herself, all anxiety, earnestly urging the men to proceed and offering five pounds for each of those who were brought out alive, and two pounds for each body of the hapless creatures who perished." Mrs. Baron-Wilson then adds characteristically: "She was dressed in a blue satin pelisse, looking lovely in her anxiety, and each time she appeared at the window she was received with animated cheers by the crowd, who seemed ready to worship her. . . . Surely this

instancee (of what ?) deserves a record here as it will have one hereafter!"

We have not the slightest desire to throw doubt on Mrs. Baron-Wilson's statement, but we must confess that we should feel more satisfied if we could have lighted upon some corroboration of this incident in any of the contemporary records. Unhappily, there is not one word about it to be found. Even the "blue satin pelisse" escaped notice. If the story be true it is very clear that Miss Mellon must have had means, or she would hardly have been so lavish in her rewards. This suggestion of the possession of money reads curiously when taken in connection with another incident which must have happened about the same time, namely the pother that was made over a necklace of imitation diamonds.

The tale apparently rests on the authority of Miss Tidswell, one of the Drury Lane company's old established members and the actress to whom Edmund Kean owed so much. Probably, in the course of frequent repetition, Miss Tidswell added a few details, but as the narrative runs it would seem that Harriot was persuaded into buying a necklace of false stones which was priced at six guineas, and as, to quote Mrs. Baron-Wilson, "such a sum was totally out of the question for her means," she arranged to pay by weekly instalments of five shillings a week. She wore the necklace when playing Lydia Languish, and "appeared sparkling and satisfied until, looking towards the right-hand stage-box she saw Mr. Coutts with some of his family and grandchildren making signs to him and laughing heartily as he examined her finery through his opera glass." She had to endure the "general quiz" of the family in the box, and on her way back to the stage she encountered one of the jeweller's workmen who had "gone to the pit to see the effect of his own workmanship," and, on her remarking in mock grief that "they all quiz them as common glass," the man said: "I wish sincerely, Miss Mellon, that *all*

did." It turned out that the audience had taken the diamonds to be real and that they were the gift of Mr. Coutts.

The gossip got abroad and the papers talked about "a certain opulent old banker and a certain actress with a certain necklace," and when Harriot went into the green-room one evening shortly after, Mrs. Mountain "sauntered up, and, examining the necklace, said with a supercilious smile, 'Very beautiful indeed, and diamonds of course,' upon which the wearer clasped the necklace round Miss Tidswell's neck with the remark, 'Miss Tidswell, I give this to you. Mrs. Mountain says they are diamonds, and *she* no doubt can afford to buy them from you,'"

There are improbabilities in the story. It is hard to believe that Miss Mellon, now on the tide of prosperity, could not afford six guineas. Mrs. Baron-Wilson forgets how she had just been dilating on the purchase of a house at Cheltenham by the much-talked-of Drury Lane actress, and also of her successful benefits at Liverpool. And she had by this time bought Holly Lodge ! Mrs. Baron-Wilson makes this assertion—surely an error—but it is vain to attempt to straighten out her involved biography.

## CHAPTER XIV

Drury Lane Theatre destroyed by fire—Harriot's practical joke on Elliston—Elliston's mysterious "Invisibilina"—Drury Lane opens—The "Address" trouble—Dr. Busby's vanity causes a scene in the theatre—Kemble's peculiarities of pronunciation—The dictators in the pit—Harriot's stage rivals, Miss Kelly, Mrs. Edwin, Mrs. Orger, and Mrs. Glover—Who bought Holly Lodge?—Harriot makes enemies in the theatre—The Drury Lane committee—Edmund Kean's ordeal—Harriot's gifts to him—Harriot and John Bannister—"Unpleasant circumstances" and annoyances.

ON February 4, 1809, Drury Lane Theatre, despite the "wonderful" water appliances and the iron curtain of which so much was made at the opening of the building in 1794, shared the fate of Covent Garden, but without other mishap beyond the entire destruction of the building. The company migrated to the Lyceum, and for the first time the press did not write its usual encouraging notices of Harriot Mellon's acting. It was probably thought that under the altered condition of things she was well provided for and that she no longer needed to be regarded as an actress who was working hard to reach the highest standard of her art.

Maybe, too, her old fault—carelessness—came back. Something of this change of feeling towards her is evident in *The Monthly Mirror* of October 1809, which, commenting on a performance of the perennial *Devil to Pay*, wrote in this uncomplimentary strain: "Miss Mellon played Nell in the farce—a clumsy rogue. Miss Kelly, whose genius rapidly develops and who promises to be a first-rate performer in this line, should have been chosen to do that justice to the part which Miss Mellon laboured to afford it, but puffed and blowed in vain." Side by side with languid praise and adverse criticism came sarcastic paragraphs such as this in *The Monthly Mirror*:

"Mr. Coutts the banker has given £100 more to the Theatrical Fund for the *relief* of decayed actors. The aged amateur shows an extraordinary deal of *mettle* in this present. He who feels so much for *other decayed actors* will, we hope, in his need meet with assistance himself."

Other papers indulged in banter. *The British Press* remarked : "Miss Mellon and Sally Stevenson. The newspapers state that on the 6th Sept. these two ladies in their chariot were by a waggon forced against the paling of the ruins of Drury Lane Theatre. A bridge of chairs was constructed over the waggon and thus they were extricated from their jeopardy with no other inconveniences than an extraordinary display of their fine shapes," adding, maybe not without intention, "Miss Mellon displayed much firmness."

George Raymond, Elliston's biographer, relates a practical joke on the part of Harriot Mellon which had Elliston for its victim. The joke, like most others of a so-called "practical" nature, had not much humour in it, but is worth notice on account of the mystery which formed its groundwork. Raymond, like the majority of theatrical biographers, is not strong where dates are concerned, but from internal evidence we may assume that the joke was played some time during the rebuilding of Drury Lane. Elliston was the hero of a mystery which belongs rather to fiction than to fact—for eighteen years he was pursued by a letter-writer whose identity, in spite of his strenuous efforts, he could never discover. These letters, the first of which he received in January 1809, evidently written by a woman, were invariably signed "Invisibilina" and were on a number of topics dramatic and domestic, and were sometimes written in poetry. Sometimes they were full of praise, at others they were severely critical. Mrs. Elliston was occasionally favoured by the writer, who, not contented with writing, also sent presents both to husband and wife. "At times," we read,

“Elliston was almost driven to madness by these inexplicable transactions.”

Miss Mellon’s joke was to write to Elliston, stating that if he would call at six o’clock on a Miss Warren in Norfolk Street, Strand, he would hear something which would enable him to elucidate the mystery of “Invisibilina.” Miss Warren was an elderly spinster with a taste for birds, her room being almost an aviary. Above her lodged a bachelor named Borrowdale, an old friend of Miss Mellon’s, and it was with his assistance that the joke was concocted. Elliston arrived, and Miss Warren, expecting a visit from a bird-fancier, a comedy of errors ensued, Miss Mellon in Borrowdale’s room listening with glee to the confusion.

What happened is not very clear, but Miss Warren commenced to scream, upon which Borrowdale thought it well to interfere and went downstairs. The room was in confusion, parrots and cockatoos were screaming, dogs were barking, Miss Warren was in terror, and Elliston dumbfounded. Miss Warren was about the last person he expected to find in “Invisibilina.” In the midst of the hubbub the maid-servant entered and whispered to Borrowdale that the “lady” was gone, meaning that Miss Mellon had taken the opportunity to escape, fearing, no doubt, that Borrowdale would invite Elliston to his rooms, where, of course, she did not want to be found. Elliston’s sharp ears caught the word “lady” and instantly turned upon the maid with a host of questions. The girl gave some sort of explanation as to the direction which the “lady” had taken, and Elliston rushed away in pursuit, but with no result. The invitation to Norfolk Street was, of course, put down as another of “Invisibilina’s” mystifications.

The opening of Drury Lane on October 12, 1812; the troubles of the committee of management over the “Address”; and their rescue by Lord Byron with an “Address” of his own, the whole business leading to the never-to-be forgotten “Rejected

"Addresses" of Horace and James Smith—which an unsophisticated Leicestershire clergyman could not understand why they were *rejected* ; "I think some of them very good," said he—are matters too well known to need relation ; but one of the most humorous episodes of the controversy—the outcry raised by Dr. Busby, author of *Concert-Room Anecdotes*, translator of *Lucretius*, and a gentleman who took himself very seriously—can hardly be passed over.

Dr. Busby had an idea he was hardly dealt with by the Drury Lane committee in preferring Lord Byron's poetry to his own, and during an interval on the opening night "the Doctor's son mounted the stage from the pit for the purpose of reciting his father's address, which, of course, caused no small diversion and uproar, but he was removed by two peace officers and quiet was thereby restored. Thursday the Doctor himself harangued the House from one of the boxes, and after many obeisances stated that he thought respectfully of Lord Byron's Address, but he could show them SOMETHING BETTER OF HIS OWN. He therefore requested they would permit his son (who was placed in the pit) to repeat his address from the stage. Here the orator was dragged away by police officers, but the audience, determined to protect MODEST MERIT received him in the lobby and compelled Raymond, the stage-manager, to permit young Busby to recite the address from the stage. The young man accordingly attempted the task, but the confusion in the house prevented its being heard and he was led off without being able to reach the end."

*The Observer*, reporting the occurrence, said : "Seareely six lines were audible and those heard were certainly no impeachment of the committee's judgment in rejecting it." Dr. Busby went to the expense of having his address printed, but the public remained unconvinced, and all the encouragement he obtained was the half-sarcastic comment of one of the newspapers that "we think it *brave* and *generous*

in Dr. Busby thus to *devote himself* by the printing of his address for the justification of the managers.” But the Drury Lane committee also came in for a share of ridicule and, it having been spread about that Colman was among the competitors who had sent in Addresses, he wrote to *The Morning Post* that “I never was mad nor foolish enough to attend (further than to laugh at) to the advertisements for addressing competitors to be judged by Mr. Whitbread’s *Entire Committee*.” Whitbread, it need hardly be remarked, was the head of the well-known brewing firm.

The point to be dwelt upon in the Busby episode is that the pit was still the dictator of the theatre. Possibly its “O.P.” victory over John Kemble at Covent Garden, after a hard-fought battle of nearly three months, strengthened its position and it continued for many years to exercise its authority. This authority was exercised in rather an unexpected way at Covent Garden during 1811. The pronunciation of words had its modes, and these modes varied. “In my youth,” once said Rogers, “everybody said ‘Lonnōn’ not ‘London.’ Fox said ‘Lonnōn’ to the last, and so did Crewe. . . . The now fashionable pronunciation of several words is to me, at least, very offensive. ‘Contemplate’ is bad enough, but ‘bālcony’ makes me sick.” Other instances of change might be cited. “Oblige” was “obliege,” “Rome,” rhymed with “doom,” and “cucumber” was “coweumber.”

Kemble had his own system. Leigh Hunt observes that “he was a reader of old books, and having discovered that pronunciation had not always been what it was and that in one or two instances the older was metrically better than the new (as in the case of the word *aches*, which was originally a dis-syllable—*aitches*), he took upon him to reform it in a variety of cases where propriety was as much against him as custom. Thus the vowel e in the word ‘merchant,’ in defiance of its Latin etymology,

he insisted upon pronouncing according to its French derivative *merchant*. ‘Innocent’ he called *innocint*; ‘conscience’ (in defiance even of his friend Chaucer) *conshince*; ‘virtue’ in proper slip-slop *varchue*; ‘fierce’ *furse*; ‘beard’ *bird*; ‘they’ *the* (because we generally call ‘my’ *me*); and ‘odious,’ ‘hideous,’ and ‘ perfidious’ became *ojus*, *hijjius*, and *perfijjius*.”

The pit endured these eccentricities from Kemble, but it would not tolerate them from any one else, and what its real opinion was became known when Charles Mayne Young played in *The Tempest* at Covent Garden. Young refused to follow Kemble in his peculiarities and when “*aitches*” was restored to “*aches*” he was rewarded with five rounds of applause (*Morning Post*, October 11, 1811). *The Theatrical Inquisitor*, in its notice of this performance, however, preferred the metrical pronunciation of “*aitches*.”

During this year almost a riot on a small scale broke out at Covent Garden, from the determination of the pit not to permit anything which touched upon its ideas of theatrical etiquette. At this time Indian and Paisley shawls were the rage, and many of the wearers displayed them in a too obtrusive fashion to please the pit. On one occasion “before the commencement of the play,” The *Post* records, “several persons in the pit raised a loud cry of ‘Shawls off the boxes!’ and this cry was kept up till everything was removed from the front of the dress circle . . . their cries were next directed to the upper boxes, and finally up to the gallery. There they met with . . . the vengeance of the *Gods* embodied in apple-cores, etc. Several of the *exalted* personages seated there braved the ire of the pit for some time, and hung their hats over in defiance. The ‘off shawl’ party, however, ultimately triumphed.”

A similar scene occurred at Drury Lane the following night with a similar result, but at Covent Garden a few evenings later the pit was kept at bay

for a long time by an iron nerved lady. Master Betty had gone through a play, and before the after-piece commenced, “a female in the third circle of boxes obstinately persisted in hanging her tippet over, though repeatedly called upon by the pit and galleries to remove it . . . the lady having had her whim out and made half the audience hoarse, suffered it to be removed from sight, and tranquillity was restored.” *The Morning Post* apparently had no sympathy with this outcry for order and decorum. It points out that “one of the inconveniences of the new regulation is that it puts it in the power of any female who has a tolerable portion of ‘that quality which is called perseverance in a good cause, and obstinacy in a bad one’ to annoy the whole house for a quarter of an hour or more whenever she pleases.”

It is noticeable that *The Theatrical Inquizitor*, in its list of the company attached to the new Drury Lane, does not give the name of Miss Mellon. She was singled out for distinction in being cast for Nell in the ever-green farce on the opening night, but her appearances were not so frequent as in the old theatre. The attentions of Mr. Coutts did not advance her theatrical prospects; there was no romance attached to the association to make it interesting, and it was inevitable that people should shrug their shoulders when they talked about it and sneer at the stories of Harriot’s generosity—stories which in Mrs. Baron-Wilson’s hands become not a little wearisome. New rivals coming into prominence narrowed her opportunities. Of these the chief was Fanny Maria Kelly, whose range was wider than Harriot Mellon’s, Mrs. Edwin, a very charming comedy actress, and Mrs. Orger, destined to become exceedingly popular.

Besides Miss Duncan—now become Mrs. Davison—an established favourite, there was Mrs. Glover, whose distinctive personality at once made its mark, and whom Boaden, writing twenty years later, termed “the ablest actress in existence.” Her stature, her

rich and powerful voice, and her expressive and intelligent face—her portraits taken at a time when her figure was somewhat too ample hardly do her justice—justified her following Mrs. Powell's example, and she played Hamlet for her benefit in 1822, thus anticipating Miss Marriot and Madame Sarah Bernhardt. All the critics agreed in pronouncing Mrs. Glover's Hamlet to be a histrionic triumph. She had wit, too, if she can be credited, as Vandenhoff asserts, with being the originator of a *jeu d'esprit* which has gone the round in many languages and has been told of any actress on whom the cap fits. Mrs. Glover, Mrs. Orger, and Mrs. Humby, a very pretty woman, the subject of an audacious couplet which was current in the clubs of her day, and of which one may hope she was ignorant, were talking in the green-room one day, and the subject was Charles Mathews and his recent marriage with Madame Vestris. "They say," said Humby, with her quaint air of assumed simplicity, "that before accepting him, Vestris made a full confession to him of all her lovers. What touching confidence!" she added archly. "What needless trouble," said Orger drily. "What a wonderful memory!" wound up Glover triumphantly. An old joke doubtless, but ever young.

With so much talent at hand it is not wonderful that Harriot should not be called upon as often as heretofore, but there may have been other reasons. Judging from an anecdote given by Mrs. Baron-Wilson, Harriot Mellon seems to have been inclined at this time to presume upon her position outside the theatre, and on one occasion drew down upon her the just reproof of the prompter and stage-manager for "obstructing the business," and she had the impertinence—no other word suits the case—to suggest an alteration of the hour of rehearsal to suit her convenience as it was such a long way to Holly Lodge!

Apropos of her Highgate residence, where she was now living, it is by no means clear whether she or

Mr. Coutts was the purchaser. Mrs. Baron-Wilson says distinctly that Harriot bought it, and at a low price, as the owner found it too small and was anxious to dispose of it ; other authorities assign the purchase to the banker, and we should imagine that the other authorities were right.

Between 1812 and 1814 there is nothing to chronicle, save that the association between Harriot and her elderly admirer was becoming closer, while the ties between her and stage life were gradually weakening. Mrs. Baron-Wilson says as much, but with her provoking absence of precision leaves one to guess at what period the effect of such weakening began to be apparent. From internal evidence, however, it would seem that it was some time during 1814. Her biographer says : “ Miss Mellon’s unfortunate hastiness in selecting friends, and equal hastiness in taking offence, caused several professional differences, which made enemies for life of those she had known intimately, and who had the power as well as the inclination to misrepresent many of her actions which had originated in good motives. Her success in life excited the envious malignity of the less fortunate, and those whose society she relinquished at the desire of Mr. Coutts never forgave the wound to their vanity.”

It is all very well to speak of wounded vanity, but may there not have been another side to the case ? It is noteworthy that, though Harriot, both as Mrs. Coutts and as the Duchess of St. Albans, never lost her interest in the stage, her connection with it under her altered circumstances was always as a patron ; we cannot trace, after she married the Duke of St. Albans, any continuation of friendship with those who had been her comrades, nor does she appear ever to have been anxious to make the acquaintance of the “stars” of the twenty years which followed her retirement, beyond engaging the leading vocalists, such as Miss Stephens and Braham, to entertain her guests at her breakfasts and her dinner



MISS FANNY KELLN.

From an engraving by Thompson, after Partridge.



MRS. GLOVER.

From a drawing by H. R. Cook.



parties at Stratton Street and her fêtes at Holly Lodge.

Mrs. Baron-Wilson claims that, during the hard struggles of Edmund Kean, while awaiting appearance before a London public, Miss Mellon was his secret—and anonymous—benefactress. It would be pleasing to have this as an established fact, but as usual the lady is vague. All she has to say is that “the individual is living who was the channel of conveying to the distressed family the timely aid which alone could have enabled Mr. Kean to ‘bide his time.’” Seeing that this was written fifty years after the act of benevolence no harm would have been done had the “individual” been named, but Harriot’s biographer is nothing if not hazy and mysterious.

Francis Phippen, Kean’s earliest biographer, has left an amusing account of Kean’s introduction to the Drury Lane Committee, that committee of which Byron wrote: “Then the Committee!—then the sub-Committee! We were but few, but never agreed. There was Peter Moore who contradicted Kinnaird, and Kinnaird who contradicted everybody . . . and yet we were all very zealous and in earnest to do good.”

No doubt; but according to Phippen the ordeal of going before this august body was very formidable. “There is,” he writes, “a certain form to be observed in the introduction of an author or a performer to this committee which is truly sublime. The person to be introduced must pass through a lane formed by the lower orders about the theatre which extends to the door of the committee room, and remain there till he is announced with a very impressive ceremony. He then walks in, and if he is an actor he must parade up and down three or four times for the purpose of showing whether he has ‘the gait of Christian, Pagan, or Man’ before any communication is had with him. If he pleases in this exhibition the chairman of the Committee rises, and, placing himself in the character of Juliet or Lady Macbeth or

some other corresponding with a favourite part of the performer, proceeds to put the intellect of their probationer to the test."

This was about the last kind of test to show Edmund Kean to an advantage, and Phippen tells us that he "was ordered to parade through the room, and having done so without appearing to be conscious that anybody was present, the Committee retorted upon him for his carelessness by making comments on his figure and face with a freedom that could be ill excused even in absence. 'God bless me! what a poor looking thing,' said one. 'He'll destroy the concern,' said another.

"They desired to hear him speak, and he spoke, but it was to assure them that he came to town to abide by the judgment of the public and not to be determined in his future views by theirs. The Committee broke up in anger, and Mr. Arnold received a lecture from them upon the subject of precipitancy of judgment."

How Kean came and saw and conquered is an oft-told tale. Nothing succeeds like success, and in the hour of his triumph the great actor was overwhelmed with gifts. Another of his biographers, Mr. B. W. Procter, tells how a nobleman of princely munificence sent a banknote of £100; Whitbread posted a draft for £50; Miss Mellon tendered him amongst various pleasant compliments £50; the Drury Lane Committee presented him with £500. Mrs. Baron-Wilson mentions Miss Mellon's £50, but according to her it was sent *before* Kean had appeared and that it was sent anonymously by the hands of the young lady who lived with her; "fearful of trusting a servant's discretion" she "even took the precaution of requesting the lady to proceed on foot to the house, and her plain carriage was left at some distance in the Strand to prevent discovery."

Mrs. Baron-Wilson's painstaking circumstantiality occasionally reminds one of Crabtree's anxiety to prove that the rumour of a duel between Sir Peter

Teazle and Charles Surface was an accomplished fact. It is certainly curious that Harriot should have sought out Kean at a time when he was unknown, and to her almost a stranger—for Mrs. Baron-Wilson owns that “they were never intimately acquainted”—and should have given him £50 secretly. “After her marriage,” we read, “it has been stated that he (Kean) was frequently invited to dinner by Mr. Coutts, but this (although the old gentleman admired his professional talents excessively) is erroneous, the dissimilarity of their habits having been so forcibly contrasted that familiar intercourse could not have afforded pleasure to either party.”

At that time the “dissimilarity,” as the lady discreetly phrases it, was not very pronounced. Kean had not then commenced his career of dissipation. He was considered good enough to be a guest of the exclusive Lady Holland. Byron writes of him dining at Holland House in 1815, and outtalking Luttrell. Hobhouse described him on that occasion as “a very handsome little man with a wild but marked countenance and eyes as brilliant as on the stage. He knitted his brows, I observed, when he could not exactly make out what was said.”

It was Harriot’s ill-fate to be lauded extravagantly whenever she gave of her plenty. Her biographer cannot lay on the colours too thickly, and everybody who has had occasion to mention the smallest of gifts has done much the same. Of course the newspapers of the day, the satirical prints excepted, set the example, and Adolphus was quite in the fashion in what he wrote in his *Life of Bannister* concerning a very ordinary tribute which Miss Mellon offered when Bannister quitted the stage some two months after her marriage. Her letter, which is kindly and unpretentious, runs as follows :

“ DEAR BANNISTER,—Twenty years we have been fellow-servants together in Drury Lane Theatre. May your retirement from labour be as happy as I

wish ! I feel assured none rejoiced more sincerely than yourself at the happy and honourable *exit* I have made from *my* professional service.—Yours truly, ‘Audrey’ (the last part I acted with you), HARRIOT COUTTS.”

Accompanying the letter was a note for ten pounds—nothing very much out of the way considering that she was in command of thousands, and remembering how much she owed to Bannister for his useful hints in correction of her histrionic faults—but Adolphus is overwhelmed and adds in a foolish strain of adulation: “As an inclosure Mrs. Coutts sent precisely what good sense and right feeling would direct; not the mere price of a few box-tickets, not the donation which would be offered to solace a retiring pauper, but that which might have been converted into an elegant and ornamental souvenir—it was a ten pound note.” The truth is that the wholesome virtue of doing good by stealth and blushing to find it fame is not very evident in Harriot Mellon’s generosity. This publicity may not have been her fault, but there is no proof that she objected.

As the end of 1814 drew near, it was generally understood, though nothing definite had been said, that Miss Mellon would not continue much longer on the stage. As Mrs. Coutts was still alive no one knew exactly what was going to happen, but every one could guess. It was obvious the question should be asked how it came about that Harriot was in command of so much money and could ride in her carriage on her salary. It was inevitable that, to use Mrs. Baron-Wilson’s words, “some unpleasant circumstances” should happen.

These “circumstances,” she asserts, “arose out of a dispute over the subscription to a box at the Lyceum between Mr. Coutts and an official of the theatre. Mr. Coutts, who had reason to believe an attempt was being made to take advantage of him,

refused to pay, and the party, having been defeated through Miss Mellon’s means, became additionally hostile to him.” This hostility took the form of intrigues at Drury Lane by which it was arranged that a lady “ disagreeable ” to Miss Mellon and “ reputed to be a particular friend of her *annoyer* ” (presumably the Lyceum official) should share her dressing-room. This intrusion, Harriot naturally resented, but the shifts she was put to in order to avoid association with the disagreeable one can hardly be deemed discreet. Again, to quote Mrs. Baron-Wilson : “ Frequently when she arrived to dress she found the door locked, and as every room belonging to the theatre was wanted at dressing time by its usual occupant she was obliged to collect the requisite articles in haste ” (how she obtained them when the door was locked is not explained), “ and dress as best she could in the ante-room of Mr. Coutts’s box, thus precluding the entry of any one to the box, to which the only entry was through this drawing-room.”

A peculiar arrangement truly, and if it gave rise to more tittle-tattle, Harriot had only herself to blame, though perhaps Mr. Coutts was not altogether guiltless, for not considering the disagreeable person “ a fit associate for her,” it was he apparently who initiated this curious state of things. One can well imagine that Harriot’s position, accentuated by her hasty temper, was not exactly a bed of roses, and that she was longing for freedom, especially as all the parts with which she had been long identified were being given to the new-comers. We are told that the worry induced her to beg to be released from her engagement and that only on the representation of Mr. Raymond, the stage-manager, that by so doing she would forfeit £1,000 (this sum in those days, and for an actress not of the first rank, can hardly be correct) did she continue. As will be seen later on—always assuming Mrs. Baron-Wilson’s statements to be correct—Raymond had a strong motive for keeping her under his eye.

## CHAPTER XV

The death of Mrs. Coutts and the mystery of Mr. Coutts's marriage with Harriot Mellon—A confusion of dates—Mr. Coutts's distress at the sight of Harriot's yellow silk stockings—The marriage guardedly announced in *The Times*—Mr. Coutts and his first wife—Lord Dundonald's statement—*The Court Journal's* account of the first Mrs. Coutts—Curious newspaper stories concerning Harriot's marriage.

HARIOT MELLON'S story during the first three months of 1815 is difficult to follow. Full of contradictions and discrepancies, it is at times impossible to disentangle fact from fiction. Mrs. Baron-Wilson, in dealing with this period, is more confusing and irritating than ever, and though she holds a brief for her heroine, she commits herself to statements which somewhat support the curious allegations afloat at the time, and afterwards made use of by the compilers of spurious biographies of Mr. and Mrs. Coutts.

If anything can be gathered from the rambling generalities in regard to the “unpleasant circumstances” mentioned in the preceding chapter it would appear that they happened between January 14 (when, according to the slipshod biographer, Harriot played Mrs. Candour, whereas the play advertised in *The Morning Post* on that night was *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Harriot had no part) and February 7. *The School for Scandal* with Miss Walstein as Lady Teazle, Harriot as Mrs. Candour, and Elliston as Joseph Surface, was played on the 4th and not on the 14th, and the occasion is noticeable if only for the opportunity it gives us to-day of learning what Elliston's acting of the part was like. We gather from *The Morning Post* that his delivery was so drawling and monotonous and “the distention of his accents from paragraph to paragraph” so prolonged, that “it seemed to be a question whether the emotions were

ever to be relieved by a pause in that unmeasured and unprepossessing tone.” As we are also told that the audience had time to yawn, the soporific effect of Elliston’s elocution can well be imagined.

The distinctive point about the performance of January 4 is, however, that, according to Mrs. Baron-Wilson’s own statement, Mrs. Coutts died on the morning of this very day. As we shall see presently Mrs. Baron-Wilson, two pages later on, assigns a different date to this event and involves herself and her readers in one of the confused knots of which her book is full. She informs us that Harriot would have taken her leave of the public as Mrs. Candour, but for a sneer in one of the papers that “she would cease to play Mrs. Candour in public and commence playing Lady Teazle in private life.” This paragraph must have appeared after the 4th, and would seem to suggest that the death of Mrs. Coutts was already noised abroad. Her death did not prevent Harriot from playing Mrs. Candour again on the 11th, and on the 18th, and at this date the funeral had taken place four days as the following shows :

“*Extract from the Register of Burials kept in the Parish of Wroxton.*

“Susanah Coutts of London, the late wife of Thomas Coutts, Esquire, Banker in Westminster, Buried January 14th, 1815. Aged 82. J. C. Townshend.

“I certify that the above is a correct extract from the Register of Burials kept in the Parish of Wroxton.

“(Signed) THOMAS WYATT,

“Minister of Wroxton Abbey near Banbury, Oxfordshire.”

Miss Mellon took leave of the stage on February 7, and when mentioning this date Mrs. Baron-Wilson has a curious footnote which runs thus : “In order to bring the theatrical career to a close without interruption we have continued to use the name of

Miss Mellon, although she had been married to Mr. Coutts previous to her retirement." The significance of this statement will be seen later on.

Harriot's last appearance was entirely free from the formality of a "farewell." Mrs. Baron-Wilson, having stated that Harriot had decided to retire as Audrey in *As You Like It*, rather than as Mrs. Candour, proceeds, after her manner, to contradict herself, and makes it appear that when Miss Mellon went to the theatre on that fateful evening she had no idea that she would never again appear before the public—as an actress. As her biographer puts the matter, it all came about through a black velvet hat, a yellow jacket laced with black velvet, striped, full and rather short petticoat, very neat feet and ankles in little buckle shoes and yellow silk stockings with black clocks—Harriot's attire as Audrey.

Mr. Coutts was in his private box as usual, and after the early scenes were over, Harriot went to the box to receive his congratulations. Alas, she was met with looks more in sorrow than in anger! Malvolio's yellow cross garters found favour in the sight of Olivia, so at least Malvolio was persuaded to think, but Harriot's short petticoat and yellow silk stockings with black clocks were too much for the poor old gentleman. Mrs. Coutts, the wife—for this we are asked to believe was the case—of the rich banker to be thus arrayed for the gloating admiration of pit and boxes! It was "most tolerable and not to be endured." We may take it that in his curt businesslike way, Thomas Coutts said he would have no more of it, and so Harriot returned to the stage and whispered to Touchstone, to borrow Mrs. Baron-Wilson's sentimentality, that "she should never again be his Audrey"; curtsied "profoundly several times" to the audience, and so retired without any one in the front of the house being aware that her retirement was permanent.

Henceforth Harriot Mellon must be regarded as Mrs. Coutts, but it was not until Friday, March 2,



HARRIET MELLON AS MRS. PAGE IN "THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR."  
From an engraving by W. Say, after S. J. Maserier.



that the news was made known to the public by the following announcement which appeared in *The Times* : “ On Wednesday, at St. Paneras Church, Middlesex, Thomas Coutts, Esq., to Miss Harriot Mellon, of Holly Lodge, Highgate.” It will be noticed that no specific date is mentioned.

Soon after, little by little, the curiosity of the town was whetted by the appearance of paragraphs mysteriously worded which seemed to indicate that there was much to be revealed. Had not Mr. Coutts been “ the richest man ” in London and had he not, through the marriages of his three daughters been connected with the aristocracy the affair might not have attracted so much attention, but Thomas Coutts was a notability, and many people professed to be shocked at his marrying so soon after his wife’s death, and especially to an actress whose reputation had been openly discussed. Naturally the conclusion was that she was the temptress and the rich banker her prey. No doubt he was pitied that he had allowed himself to be entrapped, and the wonder was how so hard-headed a man of business had been captured. But his age was his excuse. He was eighty-six, and, to use words quoted by Mrs. Baron-Wilson without contradiction and without comment, “ the marriage . . . was evidently an act of dotage.”

The history of the Coutts family is quite a pattern story of thrift, industry, punctuality, and all the business qualities so admired by the late Mr. Smiles. Yet it had its romances. Some three years before the death of Thomas Coutts, a biography was published under the title of *Authentic Memoirs of the Lives of Mr. and Mrs. Coutts, communicated by a Person of the First Respectability* ” (1819). This biography is quite laudatory in its tone of both Mr. and Mrs. Coutts, and probably was intended as a refutation of the aspersions of *Fine Acting* (1815), and also of the insinuations contained in the sneering paragraphs which for some years had from time to time appeared in the public press. But it contained

a few errors in regard to the genealogy of Thomas Coutts, and to the origin of the first Mrs. Coutts, and Earl Dundonald (who, when Lord Cochrane, was unjustly charged with fraud in connection with the Stock Exchange, and suffered a social martyrdom until his innocence was proved) published a letter on the death of Mr. Coutts setting these matters right. An ancestor of Thomas Coutts was a member of the Cochrane family, and as a boy the Earl knew Mrs. Coutts, and hence he was moved to correct the inaccuracies of the "Person of the First Respectability."

Lord Dundonald tells us that his ancestor, Sir John Cochrane, being engaged in Argyll's rebellion, was taken prisoner after a desperate resistance and condemned to be hanged. When the death warrant was expected from London, his daughter attired herself in man's clothes and twice attacked the mails conveying the warrant, and by delaying the execution gave time to Sir John's father the Earl of Dundonald to make terms for his son's pardon. The great-granddaughter of the heroine, Miss Stuart, of Allan Bank, married Thomas Coutts's father and was the mother of four sons, Peter, John, James, and Thomas. The father was a merchant in Edinburgh and also acted as a banker for his customers, the practice in those days before the establishment of separate banking houses. All the sons followed their father's business, James becoming a partner in a merchant banking house in St. Mary Axe, London, corresponding with the house of John Coutts & Co. in Edinburgh. Thomas Coutts was also a partner in the house in St. Mary Axe, and afterwards was admitted as a partner into the bank founded by James in the Strand. James had a maid named Elizabeth Starkey who had charge of James Coutts's only daughter; the damsels, "a most respectable, modest, handsome young woman," found favour in the eyes of Thomas; again romance asserted its sway and she became the first Mrs. Coutts.

Eighteenth-century maid-servants were domesticated to a degree which would amaze the modern "general," and the "Person of the First Respectability," relating how the young lord (who was at school at Hackney, where James Coutts resided) used to visit his relative, describes him as delighting "in nothing more heartily than a game of romps with Betty (? Susanna), whom he tormented by numberless mischievous boyish pranks. Amongst others, upon the general washing days when Betty was labouring at the buck-tub up to her shoulders in foaming suds . . . the young lordling would call her a *dry washer* and urge her by various tricks to souse him with soapsuds and roll him on the floor."

There is nothing remarkable in this, but Lord Dundonald took it very seriously, writing: "When in my youthful days I have occasionally seen her in the nursery washing some of her young lady's clothes, my boyish tricks may have aggravated her to throw some of the *soapsuds* at me, but I *deny* the fact of ever having stated '*that she laboured on general washing days at the buck tub, up to her shoulders*' or of my ever having denominated her a *dry washer*."

The difference is not of the slightest importance, and we may take it as established that the first Mrs. Coutts was a most estimable woman and an admirable wife. No doubt she was intelligent and that the banker, though he "moved all his life in the first circles of society, and cultivated the acquaintance of men of genius and taste in poetry and the drama," never had occasion to regret his choice is not to be questioned. Whatever has been written about Mrs. Coutts has always been to her credit, and, untutored and homely as she was, she does not appear to have been snubbed by the fine ladies into whose society she was thrown. In all probability she and her husband were looked upon as "eccentrics" and apart from the business relations which Thomas Coutts had with so many of the aristocracy their personal qualities made their presence acceptable.

An article in *The Court Journal* of April 4, 1834, purporting to have been written years before by one who knew the Coutts family, enables us to picture some of the sturdy lady's characteristics. The writer is disagreeably priggish, but this tone is only in accordance with the attitude of the "fashionables" towards those who were not what they would call *bon ton*.

"Mrs. Coutts," we read, "has afforded considerable amusement to the high born and high bred persons she is now in the daily habit of meeting, but among whom she seems to feel *deplacée*—ill at ease. Below par in mind and manners nature has not fitted her for such lofty associations; nor has any attempt been made by culture to improve the sterility of the soil: her admission to the first circles of the aristocracy would be matters of surprise were she not always accompanied by *three daughters* who . . . are the *lodestones* to whose attractions Mrs. Coutts is indebted for being invited to every ball and assembly of consequence in London. Mr. Coutts very judiciously took his daughters to Paris to finish their education, and give them the French *tournure* so essential to young ladies on their *début*. . . . The young ladies had not been long in England when the King was told that Mr. Coutts, his banker, had recently imported from France *three daughters* in the highest state of cultivation which Paris could bestow. Enough was said in their favour to excite His Majesty's curiosity and he was resolved to see them and judge for himself.

"Accordingly, the first time . . . that Mr. Coutts appeared at Court, the King . . . asked why he had not brought them to the Drawing-room. Mr. Coutts with great humility replied . . . that in reality he did not know *any lady* with whom he dared to take the liberty of requesting her to introduce his daughters. 'Why, you're Lord Bute's banker,' said the King, 'aren't you? Ask Lady Bute; yes, yes, ask Lady Bute—ask Lady Bute. Lady Bute will present them.'"

Lady Bute received the King's commands with a very ill grace, but she had no alternative, and presented the young ladies. After this invitations poured in upon them from all quarters. "The Duchess of Devonshire (Lady Georgina Spencer) chaperoned them to the Drawing-room, and the Duchess of Gordon made so great a fuss with them that it has been asserted she would marry her son the Marquess of Huntley to the eldest Miss Coutts if she could persuade old Coutts to make her his heiress and settle the bulk of his property upon her, but the banker was not to be caught. . . . To every place except to St. James', Mrs. Coutts accompanies her daughters; they are never invited without her, and if by any chance they appear only with Mr. Coutts it is by her own choice she is absent."

The writer proceeds to relate how the Coutts family were once invited by the Duchess of Gordon to a dinner at which the Prince of Wales was to be the principal guest.

"All the company had arrived save and except his Royal Highness and his *cortège* . . . in the midst of the general anxiety Mrs. Coutts rose from her seat, and walking across the room with her elbows sticking out eight or ten inches behind her back, whilst her arms seemed pinioned to her sides, went up to the Duchess of Gordon and addressed her nearly in these words: 'My dearest Duchess, I have no doubt that your Grace has got a very fine dish of fish for the Prince, and has probably taken the trouble of sending all the way to Billingsgate for the best, and to have it spoilt will be a sad pity; but that will certainly be the case if your cook puts the fish into water and lets it continue to boil. If you would allow me, I would advise your Grace to order that some water should be kept boiling, but the fish not to be put into it until the Prince arrives; then the moment that the knock is heard at the door pop it into the kettle and boil it up and it will be well done.'

“ The Duchess, who never puts any restraint upon her mirth, laughed outright ; she thanked Mrs. Coutts for her advice, and ringing the bell requested her to give her own directions to the servant to be by him conveyed to the lord president of the kitchen (*alias* the *cook*) as she (the Duchess) did not so well understand such matters. Mrs. Coutts complied with perfect gravity and with additional and minute instructions, to the infinite entertainment of the company, which was probably the end proposed by her Grace to relieve herself and her guests by the high treat which this scene afforded from the impatience which the delay of the Prince occasioned. . . .

“ We have all experienced how tenaciously old habits cling to us, and the difficulty we find, however ardously we may struggle, to eradicate those which we have acquired in early life. So it was with Mrs. Coutts. The kitchen continued to occupy a strong position in her mind from which the combined examples of her polished daughters and her own wish to assimilate herself to the habits and manners of the higher class of society in vain endeavoured to dislodge it.”

The writer then proceeds to tell how at a dinner and grand ball given by Mr. Coutts in Paris in 1787, when “ the French Nobles were at that period in general a scoffing impatient race,” some of the guests made merry over an enormous loin of roast veal which Mrs. Coutts had among other dishes placed on the supper-table, and winds up with a trivial anecdote relative to the banker’s wife washing her valuable lace with her own hands—nothing very remarkable in these levelling days, but apparently not considered the *ton* at the end of the eighteenth century. The general impression conveyed by the writer is that Mrs. Coutts was a very sensible, practical woman despite her being “ below par in mind and manners ” and had the inestimable virtue of being an excellent cook.

At first there was no suspicion that Mr. Coutts’s

marriage with Harriot Mellon was in any way irregular. *The Morning Post* of March 3, 1815, accepting the announcement in *The Times* of the day before, wrote: "The public have lost one of their *theatrical* favourites, Miss Mellon, having been yesterday converted into Mrs. Coutts, the lady of the opulent banker of that name. The charitable disposition of the lady entitles her to the good wishes of all. She is now the mother-in-law of the Dowager Countess of Guilford, the Dowager Marchioness of Bute, and of Lady Burdett." *The St. James's Chronicle* of the same date had a similar paragraph with this addition: "We know not where the happy couple pass their *honeymoon*. Miss Mellon, it is said, had been long visited by the family of Mr. Coutts, not excepting his late lady."

The matter had evidently been eagerly discussed, for on March 9 the following appeared in *The St. James's Chronicle*: "The union of Mr. Coutts with the present Mrs. Coutts arose from a motive which does honour to his heart. Many groundless reports having been *enviously* circulated at the expense of Miss Mellon's character in consequence of the friendship which existed between them, Mr. Coutts determined to place her in that rank in society she so highly merits! Ever since the death of the late Mrs. Coutts his health has rapidly declined, and under an apprehension that his dissolution was not far distant the ceremony was performed at a much earlier period than it otherwise would have been done." This unsatisfying paragraph, which has the ring of an "authorised" statement, did not stop the rumours, and on the 13th, *The Morning Post* came out with a detailed account which in all probability embodied what a good many people were saying. The *Post's* version ran thus:

"THE LATE MARRIAGE. The following is the account which is said to be authentic respecting this union.

"On the day when the ceremony took place the

lady called in her carriage at the house of the gentleman and sent up her card with her *maiden name*. The gentleman immediately entered the carriage and it drove off. The next morning the lady called and sent up her card with her *wedded name*. The two daughters of the bridegroom to whom the card was delivered and who, it seems, had not previously been acquainted with the bride, went to the window, and, observing whose carriage was at the door, one of the ladies fainted away. The husband of one of the ladies was then sent for. He at first experienced great indignation at what had happened, declaring that he had never been indebted to the father-in-law and never would, but he thought it right to remonstrate and procure a provision for his wife's sister and her family. He then had an interview with the father, who promised to make the provision required, and here the matter ended. The bride by all accounts has conducted herself with the most unassuming propriety, and as she is well known for a charitable disposition her elevation will most probably enlarge the circle of her benevolence.' "

Whatever may have happened when the new Mrs. Coutts was introduced to her daughters-in-law, who were about the same age as herself, it is not unreasonable to suppose that she was not received with open arms. Human nature, and especially feminine human nature, will out, and as it was inevitable that the marriage would affect their prospects materially in regard to the ultimate disposal of their father's wealth, one cannot blame the dispossessed ladies if they showed resentment. But as nothing definite can be said on the matter, we leave the point undiscussed.



HARRIET MELLON (MRS. COUTTS) IN 1822.

From a drawing by Cooke.



## CHAPTER XVI

*The Observer's* extraordinary statement concerning the marriage—The matter discussed by the author of *Fine Acting* and revived in 1819 by “Percy Wyndham”—Wyndham's documentary evidence—An alleged flaw in the first solemnisation, and a second marriage rendered necessary—Mrs. Baron-Wilson's discrepancies—The mystery of Raymond's £1,000 given him by Mr. Coutts—The puzzling story of the “negotiations”—The real story of the two marriages and of the falsified register.

ALL seemed fair weather, when came a bolt from the blue in the shape of a paragraph in *The Observer* of April 16. Here it is :

“A very extraordinary discovery relating to a marriage which has recently excited much of public notice was made a few days since and affords a rich treat for the scalmongers of a metropolitan parish. . . . A report having been very industriously circulated that the marriage of the banker alluded to was solemnized in *privacy* on the morning when a former matrimonial contract of one of the parties was dissolved by death, the lady of a celebrated political character, the daughter of one of the contracting parties immediately instituted an enquiry into the truth of the report. The result, it is said, has disclosed a most heinous violation of the Marriage Act, and great misconduct on the part of the officiating minister. It is said that upon reference to the marriage in question purporting to be witnessed by persons, who it turns out were not present at the solemnity, that the page of the register which contains the entry was filled up with entries of marriages which had never taken place and witnessed by the names of persons who never had existence; and, to avoid detection, the two pages of the register were pasted together. Upon this discovery the inquisi-

torial lady, it is said, went immediately to the rural retreat in the neighbourhood of Highgate where the happy couple had retired to enjoy the *auspicious honeymoon*, and reproached her *venerable* father with his want of common decency at a time when the remains of his former wife were not yet ready for interment. This interposition, it is reported, has occasioned the solemnization of the marriage ceremony over again by special licence and a complete revocation of the gentleman's will by which the obtrusive daughter is cut off with a shilling. The consequences of this discovery have been most fatal to the unfortunate gentleman who acted as minister on the occasion; his conduct immediately reached the knowledge of the reverend rector of the parish, by whom it was reported to the Bishop of London, and he has since been deprived of those clerical honours and profitable provisions he had enjoyed, and rendered incapable of administering his sacred functions. It is reported that a handsome provision has been made for him by the gentleman in consequence of the misfortunes which his misconduct has brought upon him."

Extraordinary indeed! Nothing like it had been heard since the escapade of Elizabeth Chudleigh, Countess of Bristol, Duchess of Kingston, and the tricks she played with the bogus church register at Winchester. As for the "celebrated political character," this of course was Sir Francis Burdett, and the "inquisitorial lady" was his wife, one of the daughters of Thomas Coutts.

The foregoing statement we may at once admit was not taken direct from the columns of *The Observer*, but from *Fine Acting*, published in 1818. *The Observer* for 1815 is missing from the file kept in the British Museum, and also from that in the office of the paper, and by an amazing coincidence the contemporary journals for this year, with the exception of *The Times*, have also disappeared. *The Times* ignores the sensational announcement made by

*The Observer*, and for the reason mentioned we have been unable to ascertain if the other papers had anything to say on the matter. This want of corroboration is, however, of no importance in view of the investigations we have ourselves made—investigations which have revealed a very singular story, and which, we venture to suggest, point to Harriot taking the master hand throughout the marriage business—and support the theory that Mr. Coutts was in his dotage.

The anonymous author of *Fine Acting* was well informed when he asserted that the marriage took place on January 18, and proceeding to deal with the announcement in *The Times* of March 2, he went straight to the mark, pointing out that “it was determined to keep the marriage secret till the time usually allowed to be a decent interval upon such occasions had elapsed; but for reasons best known to himself (Mr. Coutts) this resolution was not adhered to: very early in March it was inserted in the papers by authority that ‘on Wednesday were married,’ etc., etc., thus artfully inserting the day of the week, but omitting the day of the month, to induce people to suppose it had just taken place, when the fact was that they had been married so long before as has been mentioned.”

The author of *Fine Acting* was evidently aware of the second marriage, but he does not seem to have known the amazing part of the story, and he contented himself with this: “We are well informed that they were actually married by special license in their own house on the 12th of April. Now if this is true, and if it is likewise true that they were married at Pancras Church either in January, February, or March, we shall only say they have shown a singular fondness for the marriage ceremony if there were not some legal reasons for the repetition.” The statement that the marriage was solemnised “in their own house” is incorrect, but the inaccuracy is of no consequence. Undoubtedly there was a second mar-

riage on the date he gives, but it took place, like the first, in St. Pancras Church.

Before we go into the facts of this singular imbroglio it will be found interesting to inquire how Mrs. Baron-Wilson deals with it. She tells a rambling sentimental story how on the morning of Twelfth Day, 1815, Mr. Coutts unexpectedly appeared to Harriot, whom he found in a lachrymose condition. She had "an especial dread of any occurrence on Twelfth-day, . . . her sensations were beyond description miserable . . . . She wept bitterly for a length of time." When she saw Mr. Coutts "his look was so ghastly, his tall, miserable figure so attenuated by illness, his sunken eyes and faint voice were so unearthly that Miss Mellon . . . thought he had died on the fatal (why 'fatal'?) Twelfth-day and now re-appeared to her." However, he proved to be no ghost, and tottering to a chair, said, "Harriot, she is dead," and went on to explain that Mrs. Coutts \* was that morning released from her frightful sufferings.

This was the morning of January 6, Mrs. Baron-Wilson having apparently forgotten that two pages earlier she had stated with her misleading precisionness that Mrs. Coutts "died at four o'clock in the morning of the 4th January.\*" Mrs. Baron-Wilson is wroth at "one of the most wicked falscholds told against Miss Mellon," namely, "that she was married to Mr. Coutts within a few days after his first wife's death." "A few days" is rather vague. Mrs. Baron-Wilson definitely states, as already pointed out, that Harriot was married "some time previous to her retirement, on February 7" (see p. 192), and we shall see presently what little ground there was for her angry remonstrances.

\* *The Gentleman's Magazine* for January 1815 has this: "Lately, the wife of Thomas Coutts, Esq., banker, mother of the Marchioness of Bute, the Countess of Guilford, and Lady Burdett." There is no mention of the death in *The Times*. If it were on the 4th Harriot was not much disturbed, for on that date she played Mrs. Candour.

The account given by Mrs. Baron-Wilson of what happened between the death of the first Mrs. Coutts and the advent of the second is no less open to criticism. Mr. Coutts, we are told, was very ill, and his mind was oppressed by the thought that "he could not bequeath a reward for Miss Mellon's attachment and excellent conduct without leaving grounds of slander which would turn his kindness into poison for her proud mind." He consulted Raymond, the stage-manager of Drury Lane, and the two agreed that the only alternative was a private marriage "to give her a just claim to the sum he wished to bequeath." But he feared an obstacle in the shape of "Miss Mellon with her superstitious feelings and ideas of propriety," and the "invalid offered him (*i.e.* Raymond) one thousand pounds if he obtained her consent."

This strikes one as not only an amazing proposition, but presupposes a supersensitiveness on Harriot's part which was hardly to be expected. All along we have been assured by her biographer that it was the intention of the banker to make Harriot his wife whenever he was free, and that Harriot knew this perfectly well. Now that freedom had arrived why should she be coy and reluctant? The promised thousand pounds to Raymond was not the only strange thing suggested during the conference. It was seriously proposed "that the private marriage need only be made known to the world in case of Mr. Coutts' illness increasing; for if he recovered they should be publicly married after any interval she would name." It will naturally be asked why all this mystery? If Miss Mellon was so anxious about her reputation a "private" marriage about which nobody knew anything would not save it. A "private" marriage to be followed under certain circumstances by a public one was surely a very bungling arrangement and not calculated to answer the purpose intended.

Mrs. Baron-Wilson is silent concerning the mar-

riage of April 12, but it is hardly likely she had not read the statement of *The Observer* contained in *Fine Acting*, if not in the paper itself, to say nothing of the complication introduced by the marriage notice in *The Times* of March 2, and we are inclined to think her story of a private and public marriage was intended to "explain" the double ceremony without the necessity of going into inconvenient details.

Be this as it may, Raymond, we are informed, started upon his "awkward mission" and represented to Harriot that "the sole chance" of Mr. Coutts's recovery "depended on the incessant attention of some one interested for him, and finally that the sufferer had fixed his mind on having that attention *from her only*, beseeching her thus to save his life." Miss Mellon, though "agonised at the thought of losing one who had supplied the place of an indulgent father to her, saw . . . she could not with propriety go to his house, and the alternative of a private marriage" she refused "with a decision which even startled one who well knew her violent impetuosity."

In relating what followed Mrs. Baron-Wilson plunges into superlative twaddle. Apparently Harriot's "proud mind" was sorely exercised over the question of "propriety." She and Raymond were several hours together, and a friend chancing to call thought "from the angry bursts of voice" that "some unpleasant dispute had arisen which his interference might quell; but on entering the room he saw poor old Mr. Raymond actually kneeling in entreaty"—(possibly Raymond felt his thousand pounds were in jeopardy)—"before Miss Mellon, and the latter, standing in such a state of excitement that the unnoticed witness was glad to retire hastily from a scene which seemed past his influence." To this "violence" succeeded (Harriot, at this time being nearly forty, or may have been older!) "hysterical weeping," in the midst of which the pertinacious Raymond "taxed her with ingratitude to the only friend she ever possessed." Then he quoted the

example of Miss Farren "who for a length of time was publicly known to have been engaged to the Earl of Derby during even the lifetime of his first countess," and "at last, worn out, if not convinced, Miss Mellon agreed that if her benefactor still continued dangerously ill by a given time she would obtain by a private marriage the privilege of going to his house to nurse him, should an increase of danger require it."

All this—and a good deal besides, more or less inconsistent—is quite in the vein of the *Keepsake* and the *Book of Beauty*, a style of writing highly popular in aristocratic circles in 1844, the date of the *Memoirs*, and it seems almost a pity to spoil the "sentiment" of the situation by mentioning the fact that the prudent Raymond, with his eye on the main chance, had in his pocket all the time "a written consent . . . (previously drawn up and signed by business-like Mr. Coutts) . . . which she signed, and he hastened to the good old gentleman in Stratton Street." Then we are told that "at the expiration of a fortnight Mr. Raymond summoned Miss Mellon to fulfil her promise." This statement gives one furiously to think. On what day did "poor old Mr. Raymond" grovel on his knees? We are not informed, but if a fortnight intervened between the time of this agonising scene and the summoning of Harriot to fulfil her promise, Mrs. Coutts's body could hardly have been cold when her husband prepared the "written consent" for Harriot to sign—unless, indeed, the useful Raymond was the writer.

However, we will let Mrs. Baron-Wilson go on with her story. Ignoring dates (there was an obvious reason for this) she merely tells us in her off-hand fashion that "she (Harriot) went to St. Paneras Church with Mr. Raymond and another person. Mr. Coutts arrived in an equally unostentatious manner, and they were married by the curate, the Rev. Mr. Champneys." This statement would have been more convincing had the name of the "other person"

been given, but as a matter of fact the sentimental biographer was unable to do so, for, as will be seen, there was "no such person." We are then told that "when the names were signed they departed in the same way they came, Mr. Coutts having in the vestry-room presented Mr. Raymond with a snuff-box containing the promised thousand pounds, and Miss Mellon returned alone to her own house without mentioning the change of her name to the nearest friends in her confidence."

Some of this story may be true, but, as a whole, it is far-fetched and improbable, and most certainly it does not accord with the facts. Whether Mrs. Baron-Wilson knew these facts it is of course impossible to say, but having started her romance of Harriot's consent to the "seeret" marriage so that she "would obtain . . . the privilege of going to his house to nurse him" she goes on to bolster up her case.

In spite of the strong motive put forward as a reason for the seeret marriage, we do not find that the compact was adhered to. "Every day she drove as usual to his door," the *Memoirs* inform us, "and sent up to know how he was; the physicians sometimes coming down with their verbal bulletin." Surely it did not need a seeret marriage to enable her to do this? Under any circumstances such sympathy would have been only reasonable. That she did nothing in the way of personal attention Mrs. Baron-Wilson unconsciously admits in the statement that in about a month from the time of the marriage she drove one morning to the door in Stratton Street, and one of the physicians came down with great concern to tell her Mr. Coutts was considerably worse. Alarmed out of all her caution she clasped her hands and cried, 'Good heavens, tell me all! I am his wife!' The astonished physician then very forcibly described the danger of Mr. Coutts, and it was resolved that she must at once assume her place in the house of her husband, the crisis of his

This marriage  
was illegally  
solemnised  
Vide 697.

Thomas Coutts of the Parish  
of St James Westminster  
Widower

and Harriot Mellon of this Parish  
Spinster

were married in this church by licence this  
Eighteenth day of January in the year  
One Thousand Eight Hundred & Fifteen  
by me W. B. Champneys, curate

This marriage was solemnised between us { Thomas Coutts  
Harriot Mellon  
In the presence of { James Giant Raymond  
Wm H Houghton  
631.

This and the  
following  
entry are  
entirely  
fictitious  
J. Moore  
Vicar

Thomas Blackwell of this Parish  
Widower

and Susan Hall of this Parish  
Widow

were married in this church by Banns this  
Nineteenth day of January in the year  
One Thousand Eight Hundred & Fifteen  
by me W. B. Champneys, curate

This marriage was solemnised between us { The mark X of  
In the presence of { Thomas Blackwell  
The mark X of  
Susan Hall  
G. Hamp  
S. Hamp  
632.

Samuel Stacy of this Parish  
Bachelor  
and Mary Harland of this Parish  
Spinster

were married in this church by Banns this  
Twentieth day of January in the year  
One Thousand Eight Hundred & Fifteen  
by me W. B. Champneys, curate

This marriage was solemnised between us { The mark X of  
In the presence of { Samuel Stacy  
The mark X of  
Mary Harland  
G. Hamp  
S. Hamp  
633.



illness requiring unremitting care. Such " sighs the sentimental biographer, " was in reality " the ' gay honeymoon ' of the poor dying old man of eighty-six and the greatly afflicted object of his regard."

The " poor dying old man " does not appear to have been much of an invalid when, in his box at Harriot's farewell on February 7, he objected to her short petticoats and her yellow silk stockings with black clocks. Yet during the whole of this time, according to the *Memoirs*, he was at death's door ! It is vain to attempt to reconcile the contradictions of this remarkable biography, or one might well ask whether Harriot had to pay the thousand pounds which Raymond told her a few weeks previous to her marriage she would forfeit if she threw up her engagement. Nothing could well be more abrupt than her manner of quitting the stage, but no penalty seems to have been demanded unless indeed the thousand pounds which Mr. Coutts presented to Raymond in a snuffbox represented the forfeit.

We come now to the real story of the two marriages. Mrs. Coutts died on January 4th or 6th—it is immaterial which—and she was certainly buried on the 14th. What, then, becomes of Mrs. Baron-Wilson's indignation at " one of the most cruel falsehoods told against Miss Mellon " when we say that Harriot herself went to Doctors' Commons on January 17, three days after the funeral of the first Mrs. Coutts, and obtained a special licence, of which the following is a copy ?

*"Extracted from the Principal Registry of the Archiepiscopal See of Canterbury.*

" VICAR GENERAL'S OFFICE,  
" 17 January, 1815.

" Stamp 2s. 6d.

" Which day appeared personally, Harriot Mellon, and made oath that she is of the Parish of Saint Pancras in the County of Middlesex, aged twenty-one years and upwards, Spinster, and intendeth to inter-

marry with Thomas Coutts of the Parish of Saint James, Westminster, in the same County, Widower, and that she knoweth of no Lawful Impediment by reason of any pre-contract, consanguinity, affinity, or any other Lawful Cause whatsoever to hinder the said Intended Marriage and prayed a Licensee to Solemnise the same in the Parish Church of Saint Pancras aforesaid, and further Made oath that the usual place of abode of Her the Appearer hath been in the parish of Saint Pancras for the space of four weeks last past.

“Signed,

“HARRIOT MELLON.

“Sworn before me,

“SAMUEL B. MEYRICK, *Surrogate.*”

We have taken the trouble to verify this extract at the Vicar General's Office, and find it to be correct.

In spite of her “violenee,” her “hysterical weeping,” and sending “poor old Mr. Raymond actually kneeling in entreaty,” Harriot seems to have kept a remarkably level head when it came to the pinch, and no doubt she saved poor old Mr. Coutts a good deal of trouble by taking out the licence personally. We are not told the exact state of Mr. Coutts's health on the 17th, but he was certainly well enough to go to St. Pancras Church on the following day and get married—at least, he imagined he was married, but, as the sequel proves, there was a hitch somewhere. We have examined the register of marriages at St. Pancras Church, and we found the following entry, which we may say is published for the first time, the extract from the Wroxton register of deaths, the special licence, and the entry of the second marriage at St. Pancras being given in Percy Wyndham's *Strictures*:

“*Marriages solemnised in the Parish of St. Pancras in the County of Middlesex in the year 1815.*

“Thomas Coutts, of the Parish of St. James, West-

minster, widower, and Harriot Mellon of this Parish, spinster, were married in this church by licensee this eighteenth day of January in the year one thousand eight hundred and fifteen by me, W. B. CHAMPNEYS.

“ This marriage was solemnised { THOMAS COUTTS.  
between us { HARRIOT MELLON.  
“ In the presence of { JAMES GRANT RAYMOND.  
“ Wm. H. HOUGHTON.”  
“ 631.”

On the margin of the entry is written “ This marriage was illegally solemnised. Vide 697 ” ; and there was good reason for the marginal note, for the name “ Wm. H. Houghton ” was added afterwards, and the ink is of a different colour from that of the other signatures. Apparently “ Houghton ” was some minor official employed in the church, for he seems to have acted as a genuine witness on many occasions. Whether he actually signed his name on the Coutts’s entry or his signature was forged, it is impossible to say. But the point is that he was not present at the ceremony. Following the entry are two others, both bogus. The names of the bride and bridegroom, the witnesses, are all fictitious ; the only genuine signature is that of the curate, the Rev. W. B. Champneys. It is easy to see why only Raymond was present at the first marriage of January 18. Secrecy was all-important and another witness might have let his tongue wag. But why was so much mystery necessary, and why so much haste ? Was Harriot anxious to strike while the iron was hot, and was she afraid that Mr. Coutts’s daughters would interfere ? We fancy that most persons would answer these questions in the affirmative. At any rate, Harriot was able to control her emotion, for on the evening of her wedding day she appeared as Mrs. Candour.

Six weeks passed by and *The Times* of March 2 came out with its notice of the marriage. The most unexpected and startling result followed. The vicar

of St. Paneras rubbed his eyes when he read that the richest banker in London had been married to a comedy actress at his church, and he knew nothing about it! The reverend gentleman rushed off post haste, paper in hand, and asked George Hamp, the sexton, what it meant. "Oh," said Hamp, "it's quite true, but it took place six weeks ago." Then came further questions of Hamp, who, according to "Percy Wyndham," was very sore that he was not called to act as a witness, thus losing the handsome present which otherwise would have been his, and so it came out that Raymond was the only witness—a distinct non-compliance with the Marriage Act which laid it down that there should be two!

The matter was probed into and it turned out that the curate, the Rev. Mr. Champneys, had lent himself to a very serious piece of deception, the consequence of which was that Thomas Coutts and Harriet Mellon were not truly and properly married! The marriage might not be positively invalid, but it is certain there was a flaw which, unless rectified, might lead to endless litigation after Mr. Coutts's death when his widow came to take possession of his huge fortune. Whether this was the view of Mr. Coutts—or, shall we say, of Mrs. Coutts, and her coadjutor Mr. Raymond?—no one can decide, but it is clear that the vicar of St. Pancras refused to countenance the fraud and the grave offence of tampering with the church register, for he communicated with the Bishop, and Mr. Champneys the curate, who was at the bottom of the whole thing, was suspended.

Meanwhile it was decided that the marriage must be solemnised over again, and accordingly the couple, accompanied by the faithful Raymond—happy, we may presume, in the possession of his snuffbox and the thousand pounds—once more proceeded to the church, where another curate tied the knot over again, the vicar possibly objecting to have anything to do with setting right the tricky business. The following is a copy of the entry relating to the second

marriage, when every condition laid down by the Marriage Act was complied with :

“ Saint Pancras—Thomas Coutts, of the Parish of Saint James, Westminster, widower, and Harriot Mellon, of this Parish, spinster, were married in this Church by Licence, this Twelfth day of April in the year 1815

“ By me, WILLIAM FALLOFIELD, A.M.

“ This Marriage was solemnised { THOMAS COUTTS.  
between us { HARRIOT MELLON.

“ In the Presence of us, { JAMES GRANT RAYMOND  
“ No. 697.” { GEORGE HAMP, *Sexton.*

The story is a very queer one and invites speculation. It is not to be supposed that the Rev. Mr. Champneys was such an arrant imbecile as to tamper with the register and commit forgery for his own gratification. Nor can we believe that Mr. Coutts, the soul of honour and rectitude as he was represented to be, would of his own knowledge be a party to a tissue of deception involving the offences of which Mr. Champneys seems to have been guilty. Besides, he was eighty-six, in his dotage, and in “ an almost dying condition.” Mr. Coutts may consequently be dismissed from any suspicion of guilty collusion. But with Raymond and Harriot Mellon the case is different. Raymond would be a thousand pounds the richer by the marriage, regular or irregular, and Harriot might reasonably expect that Mr. Coutts, with one foot in the grave, would not trouble her long. In any event, whether he was dead or alive, she would have the command of thousands. Indeed, it seems pretty clear that *before* the marriage she only had to ask to have, and it is difficult to avoid the conjecture that it was she and not Mr. Coutts who promised Raymond the thousand pounds.

At the same time, the muddle over the register,

with its false entries and its bogus second witness, was a stupid piece of business, and one wonders why it was done. An irregularity would surely defeat the end in view. The old gentleman and the middle-aged lady once properly married, all the daughters and sons-in-law in the world would be powerless to interfere. The conclusion already hinted at is unavoidable. Raymond and Harriot were determined upon the utmost secrecy, and they meant to leave nothing to chance. They arranged matters with Champneys, who—no doubt for a price—undertook to get over the difficulty of the necessary second witness, and the inevitable inference is that he himself admitted the three into the church and that no one else was present. We presume that the parish possessed a clerk, but he is nowhere mentioned, for the reason that he was kept in the dark. As for Sexton Hamp, it may be questioned whether he knew anything of the matter at the time, though it is pretty clear he found out all about it afterwards, and it would not be surprising if it were he who supplied *The Observer* with the information which so fluttered the dovecote at Holly Lodge. So far as the register was concerned, *The Observer's* statement was quite correct save in one particular. There are no signs of the two leaves having been “pasted together.”

The two entries of bogus marriages following the entry of the first Coutts marriage were evidently inserted to fill up the page, and are only to be explained on the possibility of the ingenious Champneys imagining that if the rector or the clerk chanced to open the register at this particular part their eyes would fall upon “Samuel Stacy and Mary Harland” at the bottom of the page, and that they would not trouble to look at the top and so light upon the significant names of Thomas Coutts and Harriot Mellon. If there be any other theory to explain the mystery it would be interesting to know what it is. It was always understood that Champneys lost nothing by being suspended, but that from some

source compensation came to him—the amount of which, however, whispered the gossipmongers, he considered anything but adequate to the services rendered. There is no doubt that in these days he would have been prosecuted and fined, if not imprisoned, that is, supposing he committed forgery.

One point is left unsettled. Were two licences necessary? Only one was issued from the Vicar-General's Office, that of January 17. The one licence *may* have served for the two ceremonies, but this is hardly likely, and the probability is that the second licence was obtained from the Bishop of London's Registry, or from the Faculty Office. As secrecy was all-important a second application at the Vicar-General's Office would have involved an embarrassing explanation. We have not, however, deemed it necessary to elucidate this nice question. The registry of St. Pancras' is all-sufficient to tell the story.

In Mr. Ralph Richardson's history of *Coutts & Co., Bankers*, we have this statement, "Betty Starkey died on October 22, 1814, and his matrimonial proposals to his second inamorata were as prompt as they were laconic. Calling upon her at Holly Lodge nearly a month after his wife's death, he said, 'My dear, you must come with me to church and be married. Your reputation will otherwise be destroyed. There is no other way to protect you.' We are afraid, in view of the facts, that Mr. Richardson's version is quite as fanciful as Mrs. Baron-Wilson's.

## CHAPTER XVII

The life of Mr. and Mrs. Coutts at Holly Lodge—Troublesome neighbours—Mrs. Coutts as “Lady Bountiful”—Resident doctors engaged and troubles follow—“Percy Wyndham’s” story of the resident doctors—The poverty and distress of 1817 and Mrs. Coutts’s indiscriminate charity—She is pestered by beggars—Abuses caused by her injudicious bounties—Wholesale almsgiving abandoned and a round of dinner-parties entered upon—The extravagance of the moneyed classes—The movements of Mr. and Mrs. Coutts constantly chronicled—Mr. Coutts sits for his bust to Nollekens—The sculptor’s eccentricity—Death of Mr. Coutts—Harriot now “the richest widow in Great Britain.”

WHETHER Mrs. Coutts, after the marriage was announced in *The Times* of March 2, was installed at the Coutts mansion, Stratton Street, Piccadilly, or continued to reside at Holly Lodge is a matter of speculation. “Percy Wyndham,” among other extravagances, has a most absurd story to the effect that the banker kept her in seereey for two years in a house, No. 17, Southampton Street, Covent Garden, and the minuteness with which he describes this house, “the second house from the barber’s at the corner of Tavistock Street and also the third door from the Market, being the centre house of the five at the east side,” does not make the statement any less ridiculous. There was no secret about her residence in Southampton Street.

Another legend put forward also by “Wyndham” tells how at the end of the two years “Madam walked into Stratton Street House” and had no sooner set her foot there “than she ordered the door of communication that the deceased Mrs. Coutts had opened into the adjoining house occupied by Lady Burdett, her other daughter, to be instantly stopped up to prevent the old man visiting Lady Burdett as formerly.”

These matters it is impossible to clear up, and Mrs. Baron-Wilson has certainly done her best to

make confusion worse confounded. Forgetting that she has represented Mr. Coutts on March 2 to be "a poor dying old man of eighty-six," she writes, "this public celebration of their union was attended by a numerous party of high distinction." Later on, we are informed that Mrs. Entwistle died at Cheltenham May 6, 1815, and "on the day the intelligence arrived . . . a distinguished dinner party was expected at Stratton Street, including among the guests His Royal Highness the Duke of York," from which it may be gathered that whether Mr. Coutts was well or ill, the new Mrs. Coutts had lost no time in taking up her position. Indeed that position was soon recognised, for on April 28 a portrait of her (which we reproduce on page 200) appeared in *The European Magazine*. As for the alleged family dissensions *The Morning Post* records on June 7 that "The Countess of Guildford with the Ladies North have been rusticating during the last week with Mr. and Mrs. Coutts at Holly Lodge," by which we may assume that if such dissensions existed they were by this time healed.

This rural retreat was much fancied by Mr. Coutts, and "soon after the marriage, alterations and enlargement of the house, with additions to the grounds, became the order of the day," no doubt under the energetic superintendence of its mistress, who could now indulge any fancy, no matter how extravagant, which entered her head. But it was not all unalloyed happiness. Suburban neighbours have ever a way of making themselves unpleasant, and the fly in the ointment at Highgate was a patch of ground which Mr. Coutts coveted without being willing to pay the price demanded. The owner (the "Person of the First Respectability" speaks of him as a Member of Parliament for the County of Middlesex) conceived a plan by which he thought to coerce the old gentleman into accepting his terms, and finding he had a right-of-way through the grounds of Holly Lodge he made use of his right and deposited heaps of refuse,

brick-bats, etc., on his patch of land which was in full sight of the lawn.

Mrs. Coutts's indignation knew no bounds, and matters came to a crisis when "the Duke of York and some of the Royal Family were particularly struck by the slovenly appearance of clothes hung in such beautiful grounds." The only thing was to build a high wall to shut out the hideous sight, and accordingly this was done. Mrs. Baron-Wilson remarks that "the story at Highgate is that the wall was sixty feet high," but adds judiciously that "this is not given in the authority of a builder." The wall brought the owner of the patch to book, he came down to Mr. Coutts's price when "orders were sent out for the instant demolition of the brick screen . . . and by the very next day . . . the coach-passengers in the road vainly looked for the 'great wall' which had afforded so much amusement." Doubtless this "instant demolition" was exaggeration, but it is certain that Mrs. Coutts gave the workmen no peace until the obstruction was removed.

While the nine days' wonder was fresh all kinds of tales were afloat. The "Person" says: "Amongst innumerable absurdities it was rumoured that Mrs. Coutts was forced to maintain two stout men, well armed, who slept in the adjoining room to protect her from the enmity of Mr. Coutts' family! The Earl of — affirmed that the first year of their marriage she expended upwards of forty thousand pounds of Mr. Coutts' money, which was a matter which did not concern his lordship, and if true was in itself a laudable act, as no doubt her husband fully approved of her munificence." He adds indignantly: "Mrs. Coutts lives on the happiest terms of intimacy with Mr. Coutts' daughters, their families and connections; was visited by the late Princess Charlotte of Wales and her truly respectable husband, and her society is courted by the first families in the Empire, yet Mrs. Coutts was not good enough to be allowed to come in contact, even as the distributor of alms,

with some of the upstart mongrel breed of half-bred anomalous gentry who reside around her villa."

In spite of Mrs. Baron-Wilson's minute and trivial details, one has a difficulty in picturing the real Harriot. This difficulty is possibly owing to the biographer's delight in throwing the glamour of sentimentality over everything. Reading between the lines, however, and with the assistance of the side-lights shed by newspaper paragraphs, it would appear that Mrs. Coutts liked nothing better than the "torrent of a woman's will" and that she had "moods" which made her rather a difficult person to deal with. She was both capricious and obstinate, but also the soul of good humour if managed the right way. Her ideal was that of a Lady Bountiful, but the persons upon whom she bestowed her indiscriminate gifts had to be grateful or the fountain of charity at once ceased to flow. It is hardly likely Mr. Coutts, at his advanced age and in his feeble state of health, ever thwarted her. No doubt she was conscientiously concerned about him. One can imagine that she was of the type of woman who would kill a man with kindness; but, well-intentioned as she was, she must at times have been very trying, for her kindness was not always tempered by discretion.

Like a good many ignorant people she had a profound belief in the power of doctors. In those days of over-eating and over-drinking there was nothing strange in this. Doctors, whether quacks or orthodox, flourished. It was an age of epidemics and ignorance. Smallpox was looked upon as a thing, everybody, no matter how rich or well placed, was bound to go through. Specifics were articles of faith, and pet remedies, held to be infallible by those who prescribed them, abounded. Superstition was not absent from the worship of pills and potions, and of superstition Mrs. Coutts had more than her fair share. She had a notion not far removed from vanity that "whatever came from *her* hand must be

most acceptable to the invalid and that her presence would bring comparative ease to those she loved," says her biographer, adding: "It is said when the Duke of St. Albans took the smallpox during its preliminary shiverings the Duchess thought nothing would be so efficacious as a cashmir shawl from her neck, and one after another of these hundred-guinea articles was just worn by her for a few minutes and transferred to the chilled sufferer, although she knew her own dread of infection would never allow her to resume their use." What became of these centres of disease, we wonder?

As the doctor was regarded as a kind of magician—a belief which the faculty took care to encourage—no doubt Mrs. Coutts had a secret hope that she was prolonging her aged husband's life by having a resident physician. Accordingly a gentleman whose principal claims for selection appear to have been that he was advanced in years and had a wife (a bachelor was inadmissible) was appointed at a salary of £500 a year. Trouble soon came about: the doctor's advanced years afforded him no protection, his wife became jealous of the handsome Mrs. Coutts, and the usual weapon of the cowardly and malicious—anonymous letters—descended. Eventually the married doctor had to go, and an unmarried one was appointed. This gentleman was a nervous hypochondriac, who made the stipulation that he was not to be called up at night after he had retired to rest.

The rule, however, had to be broken when Mr. Coutts, while staying at Salthill, met with an accident. Mrs. Baron-Wilson does not give the year, but it was in 1820, *The Morning Post* recording on April 6, how "the Duke of Sussex went to Salthill on Saturday morning on a visit to Mr. Coutts, who we regret to hear has had the misfortune to break two of his ribs." The occasion was one when the services of a doctor were essential, but the resident medical gentleman hotly resented being disturbed, and behaved both to

Mr. and Mrs. Coutts in a fashion the only explanation of which was that he was out of his mind, but this was not suspected at the time.

The doctor's abusive outburst leads Mrs. Baron-Wilson to make one of her solemn and ingenuous comments thus: "The hasty violence of Miss Mellon's temper has been so often shown in the course of this work that her deep anxiety and alarm about Mr. Coutts may be inferred from the fact that she made no reply to the torrent of undeserved violence of the doctor." Why Mrs. Coutts did not get rid of this incompetent person is puzzling—perhaps she thought a doctor could do no wrong. Anyhow the matter subsided and things went on quietly until a dinner was given at Holly Lodge to the Dukes of York, Clarence, Kent, and Sussex. The doctor regarded it as a great slight that he was not invited, and more unpleasantness occurred. Still he was retained, but when he took to having frequent fainting fits, some of them "occurring even at table," it was thought well to send him for change of air to Ramsgate, where he promptly put an end to himself.

After such an uncomfortable experience one would have thought the system of a resident doctor would have been abandoned, but this was not the case, and during the period of her widowhood whenever she took a long journey, Mrs. Coutts always included her resident doctor in her retinue, bringing to mind the Duchess of Kingston—with whom, one may remark in passing, Mrs. Coutts had many points in common in her hasty temper, her whimsical imperiousness, her impetuous generosity, and her love of display—who travelled to Russia with a couple of chaplains in her suite.

"Perey Wyndham" boils the business of the resident doctors and of the retinue down to the following curt fragment: "Besides . . . Mr. Coutts's Barber and Dr. Hooper the Physician she enlisted or hired numerous other Gentlemen into her pay, but almost always married men. Mrs. Hooper, however, alarmed for

the fate of her Husband's virtue in such company, brought a coach full of Band Boxes and Trunks to Piccadilly and demanded half of her Husband's bed and the doctor was discharged. Mr. Andrews a surgeon of Greek Street was then engaged and as suddenly dismissed and then *destroyed himself*."

It looks as if Harriot, in her impulsive way, was in the habit when frightened by illness of making extravagant promises to her physicians. Dr. Yates, a Brighton doctor, who attended her at the last claimed £10,000 after her death, asserting that she had agreed to give it him. The claim was disputed and compromised.

Mrs. Coutts commenced her career of lavish, and, in many cases, ill-judged almsgiving in an unfortunate year—1817. The termination of a long period of warfare had let loose hundreds of discharged soldiers and sailors, most of them more or less destitute. Numbers of men, maimed in battle or wasted by disease, were thrown upon their relatives who themselves were hardly able to earn their living so scarce was employment, and so badly paid for when it was found. Bread had not been less than a shilling the quartern loaf for nearly a generation, fresh meat was dear, and bacon, owing to the salt tax—the duty during the war was £30 per ton, and it was not reduced until 1823—was far beyond the means of the poor. How they contrived to keep body and soul together is a question which no one living in the comparative luxury of to-day can answer.

The country swarmed with beggars, and to cope with the evil the Mendicity Society was formed and commenced its operations in 1818. The idea was that begging was an imposition and could be put down by prosecution. For a time constables, the society's officers, and magistrates were busy, but without any visible signs of a decrease in the number of beggars. The society, like a good many other societies, justified its existence in the usual way—it collected subscriptions and it paid its officials. Some

people had their doubts whether there might not be a way of dealing with destitution other than by putting persons into prison because they had no money and no home to go to, and a Mr. Henry Burnett Gascoigne, in a letter to *The Times* of February 6, 1819, suggested the formation of a corporation for the employment of beggars and the unemployed poor "under the provision of an existing Act passed the 13th and 14th of Charles II." No one, however, could see how the suggestion was to be carried out practically, and after some discussion it was heard of no more.

Meanwhile Mrs. Coutts had a long list of pensioners who besieged Holly Lodge, and no one ever went empty away. To the regular pensioners were soon added crowds of tramps who had heard of the earthly paradise and were clamorous to share the good things which were to be had for the asking. Occasionally the Lady Bountiful's temper gave way under the strain and a temporary cessation of alms-giving followed.

"In these sudden transitions," writes the friendly "Person of the First Respectability," from whose book we have already quoted, "Mrs. Coutts acted imprudently. She excited the malice of her censorious neighbours by her liberality and their ridicule by a sudden close of her public charitable donations. The construction of a tent at the entrance of her pleasure grounds, the assemblage of an immense crowd of supplicants of every description to whom in her own presence her donations of clothing, food, and money were almost indiscriminately distributed, was bitterly ridiculed by her enemies and imputed to ostentation: and not a few depraved wretches uttered the foulest of calumnies against their benefactress for not giving more. From this period (Christmas 1817), there have been no more such exhibitions, and her bounty at Holly Lodge during the late Christmas (1818) has been limited to a few petty gifts to the poor of the almshouses."

Until necessity made this step a matter of com-

pulsion, Mr. and Mrs. Coutts suffered a period of martyrdom. They were inundated with letters and petitions. They were compelled to beg the General Post Office to have all letters not franked and those that were obviously begging epistles detained. The Lodge porter was ordered not to take in letters or petitions, and circulars were printed informing applicants that the begging letters were so numerous it was impossible to read them. Thousands upon thousands of such appeals were said to have been thus destroyed.

An unexpected evil arose out of indiscriminate bounty. Much of it went to save the pockets of those who paid taxes, and in many cases the parish officers deducted relief money from the pittances she allowed to poor families. The "Person of the First Respectability" suggested that Mrs. Coutts "would perhaps do well to apply relief with greater secrecy; and to confine it as nearly as possible to the most respectable and decent of the poor; for there are almost everywhere shoals of polluted idle, drunken wretches whose greatest abhorrence is labour, and on whom alms are literally wasted . . . and it was such rabble as they who were heard cursing and reviling their benefactress in December 1817."

The spectacle of a crowd of ragged recipients of her charity chorusing thanks was of course very pleasing to the lady's vanity, and it must have come as an unpleasant shock to find that there was such a thing as ingratitude, and for a time her impetuosity sent her to the other extreme. At any rate we hear no more of the wholesale almsgiving at Holly Lodge, and apparently she settled down into a jog-trot routine of dinner parties, visits to the theatre, and jaunts into the country.

"Mr. and Mrs. Coutts gave a splendid dinner to a large party of distinction," said *The Morning Post* of March 2, 1819. "The dessert was the richest and most delicious seen in the west end of the town this season." The representative of *The Morning Post*



From a contemporary caricature (see Introduction).



had not then earned the title of "Jenkins," bestowed upon him some thirty years later by *Punch*, but he was qualifying himself for it. The "delicacies of the season," the "dessert" and the wines invariably excited his enthusiasm. The "champagne and burgundy" at a supper and ball given by the Duke of Buckingham at his country seat were "most excellent" and a novelty introduced by his grace called forth all his powers of description. "When the cloth was removed," he writes, "an agreeable surprise was produced by the folding doors being thrown open and a figure representing the Champion of England, who was armed, *cap à pie*, and had the finest plume of white ostrich feathers ever seen, appeared. He challenged any one to gainsay that the ladies present were not the most beautiful, the most amiable, the most accomplished in the world." Nobody accepting the challenge he retired, and "from the long perspective (15 rooms) the eye could trace the unknown until he vanished into shade." But we ought to be grateful to "Jenkins." In a way he reflected the times, and we should miss much that concerns the history of manners but for the chronicles of *The Morning Post*.

The irony of life seems to have ordained that while the great mass of the people was half-starving the luxury of the rich was never more pronounced. During the Regency and the first years of George IV nothing was too extravagant in the way of eating and drinking to those who could afford to indulge in the pleasures of the table. The eccentricities of the wealthy were perhaps not so marked as in the early days of Henry Angelo, who speaks of having dinner with a noble duke who always had his dogs in his room when he dined, and a man-servant whose sole occupation was to feed the animals, not forgetting to wipe their mouths with a napkin after each course; but the epicures had their ways.

One of this class was a Mr. West, spoken of by Mrs. Lybbe Powys, who had hot rolls wrapped in

flannel brought every morning to his house, Culham Court, Oxfordshire, by relays of horsemen from Gunter's! Farmer George, who stayed once with Mr. West, was, with all his rigid ideas of simplicity and economy, in no way shocked at this piece of extravagance. "Ah, Gunter, Gunter!" he is reported to have remarked. "I am glad you deal with Gunter, West. Nobody like Gunter." In 1819-20 there was a tendency to have everything of the best, no matter how expensive—in May, 1819, peas in Covent Garden market fetched 32s. a peck—but towards the end of the twenties this delicacy of taste, as we shall have occasion to note, degenerated into grossness.

Scattered over the years 1819-22 are allusions in the newspapers to the movements which sufficiently indicate the life of Mr. and Mrs. Coutts. We read how on May 20, 1819, at the dinner of the Drury Lane Theatrical Fund the announcement of a donation of £50 by Mrs. Coutts was "received with loud applause," and in the course of the evening the Duke of York "proposed the health of Mrs. Coutts, which was drunk with enthusiasm."

In August "Mr. and Mrs. Coutts have taken a large house at Brighton for the season and set off with their establishment to pass the next two months there." In May 1820, "Mr. and Mrs. Coutts, with their wonted liberality and ever disposed to foster theatrical establishments, have taken an orchestra box at the Olympic for the whole season." In September 1820, "Mr. Coutts' birthday was celebrated on Monday at York House in Bath by an elegant dinner given to a large party of friends, amongst whom were Lord Erskine, the Hon. Mr. Pretty, M.P., Mr. Fuseli, R.A., and Col. Ray. On this occasion twenty poor deserving families were liberally regaled and made happy by Mrs. Coutts presenting them with a seasonable supply of bedding, clothing, and money."

It would be doing an injustice to Mrs. Coutts to

say that she had any hand in publishing her acts of charity. Apparently the newspapers considered that the public were only concerned about her by reason of her wealth, and naturally anything that related to this all-absorbing subject found its way into print. Unfortunately for Mrs. Coutts she got the credit of being the instigator of these advertisements.

Fuseli, whose weird stagy productions were looked upon as very wonderful at the time (they would fetch low prices under the hammer to-day), was an intimate friend of Thomas Coutts, who thought highly of him. J. T. Smith, in his *Life of Nollekens*, has a brief reference to Coutts and Fuseli, which in its human interest is worth pages of Mrs. Baron-Wilson's laborious cloudinesses.

“Mr. Coutts said to me yesterday,” observed Fuseli, “‘My family have urged me to sit for a bust to be executed in marble. Now, as you know, Fuseli, that the price is not an object, pray tell me who you think will execute it best?’ I had no difficulty in doing this, for though Nollekens is superannuated, in many particulars he stands unrivalled.” Smith gives an amusing account of the sitting during which Nollekens seems to have showed more amiability—if so egotistical, and cross-grained bear of a man could be said ever to descend to amiability—than he did towards the majority of his sitters. Probably, mean and miserly as he was, Nollekens was impressed by the banker’s reputation for being enormously wealthy.

“This bust of the late Mr. Coutts, the banker,” Smith continues, “was one of Nollekens’ last productions and one in which he appeared to take much pleasure, but I must say that as to likeness it is certainly ridiculously severe. In my mind it displays the distorted features of a distressed person labouring under the heavy pangs of poverty, penury, or peevishness, neither of which cheerless characteristics did Mr. Coutts at any period of his life possess. . . . Mrs. Nollekens assured me that during the numerous sittings which that wealthy man gave Mr. Nollekens

no one would be more attentive to him than Mrs. Coutts, who never failed to bring with her in her carriage some of the most delicious and comforting soups or refreshments that could possibly be made, which she herself warmed in her saucepan over the parlour fire; ‘ and I declare, my good sir,’ continued Mrs. Nollekens, ‘ I believe it did me as much good to see old Mr. Coutts enjoy every spoonful of it as it would have done had it passed through my own mouth.’ . . . ”

The scene during these sittings in Nollekens’ studio at 9, Mortimer Street, suggests something quite Hogarthian. Mrs. Nollekens, who seems generally to have been present, was nearly bent double with age and infirmity. “ A wryneck had much twisted her head, which in the best possible position reclined upon a wing of a nurse’s old-fashioned high-backed night chair, covered with a broad chequered red and white stuff, and her swollen legs, which were almost useless, were placed upon a stool for the day by her ‘ flesh-brush rubber,’ a woman who regularly attended her for an hour every morning.” . . . “ Mr. Coutts was blowing his broth attended by Mrs. Coutts, a lively woman most fashionably dressed: whilst Nollekens . . . nearly as deaf as a post was prosecuting his bust and at the same time repeating his loud interrogations as to the price of stocks to his sitter, who had twice most good-temperedly stayed his spoon when it was considerably more than halfway to his mouth, and turned his head to answer him.” This bust was exhibited in the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1816.

Mr. Coutts was certainly treated by Nollekens with more civility than was an illustrious personage who dared to laugh at the ridiculous picture the sculptor presented. Nollekens had got himself up in full dress in honour of his visitor. His powdered toupet stiffly pomatumed stood pointedly erect, he had put on a coat to which the tailor had given an enormously high buckrammed cape, so that his head appeared as if it were in the pillory. To look over

this cape, Nollekens had to stretch his neck to its fullest possible extent, but as he proceeded taking the cast of his model, his head was so completely buried within the cape that nothing but the pinnacle of his toupet was visible above it. The visitor and his friend exchanged smiles, which so exasperated the sculptor that, thrusting his thumb into the mouth of the model, he impetuously exclaimed, with a treble wag of the head : “ If you laugh I’ll make a fool of ye.” Smith omits to add whether the sculptor was compelled to carry out his threat.

Those who care for the chronicling of small beer will find plenty of it in Mrs. Baron-Wilson’s *Memoirs* relating to this period. No doubt Mrs. Coutts devoted herself to her husband, but neither her devotion nor her resident physicians could stave off the inevitable, and on February 24, 1822 (Mrs. Baron-Wilson by an extraordinary blunder puts the date as March 2), the old gentleman died, as we learn from the following from *The Morning Post* of February 25 : “ Yesterday the 24th inst., died at his house in Stratton Street, Thomas Coutts, Esq. Mr. Coutts had attained the advanced age of ninety. His life was one of great and useful exertion. He possessed a singularly clear judgment, with a warm and affectionate heart. Few men ever enjoyed, in the degree which Mr. Coutts did, the confidence and esteem of his friends, or obtained unaided by rank or political power so much consideration and influence in society. The large fortune which he acquired was a consequence and not the object of his active life, which at every period was devoted to the aid and advancement of those he loved. He died surrounded with friends in the presence of Mrs. Coutts, and his daughters, the Countess of Guilford and Lady Burdett, with their families, and Lord Dudley Stuart, the son of his second daughter, the Marchioness of Bute, who is now in Italy on account of her health.”

All kinds of wild rumours were afloat as to the amount of Mr. Coutts’s fortune, and *The Morning*

*Post* a few days later settled the matter by announcing that :

“ Some time previous to his death he settled upon Mrs. C. the sum of £600,000 with the house in Stratton Street, all the plate, linen, etc.—the service of plate is said to be the most valuable of any in the country, and the stock of wines greater than any two private cellars in the kingdom—together with the house at Highgate, and all its appurtenances. Mrs. C. is likewise left half-proprietress of his immense banking establishment, with all monies due to him at the time of his decease. The affairs of the house have been made up since his demise, and it is said there is a balance of £670,000 due to Mrs. C. which will be proved under the will. The whole amount of property (with the annual profits of half the banking business) makes her the richest widow in the United Kingdom.

“ The reason given by some of the friends of the late Mr. Coutts for his bequeathing the whole of his immense property to his widow is that he had a firm reliance on her equitable distribution of the greater part of it among his relatives, and that besides a considerable saving would be made in the legacy duty. Now in case he had been actuated by an economical motive of this kind the sum so saved on taxation must have been a mere trifle compared to the mortification his daughters and grandchildren must feel at receiving the property from her hands instead of his.”

The pomp and circumstance of the funeral of a high personage a century ago was a terrible display of undertakers’ solemnity and useless paraphernalia. This is how the procession left Stratton Street for Wroxton, Oxfordshire—ten horsemen, two and two, mutes, plume of feathers, bearers, the hearse drawn by six black horses, bearing on the palls the armorial escutcheons of the family, supporters with scarfs, three mourning coaches and six, the carriage of the deceased drawn by four black horses followed by a

long train of noblemen's and gentlemen's carriages. The journey took five days, the cavaleade proceeding with no unseemly haste, but at the comfortable rate of eighteen miles a day. This slow pace we presume was not out of respect for the dead so much as owing to the exigencies of locomotion. The procession had to put up every night at a posting inn, and had the horses been fatigued no relays of the proper funeral colour would have been procurable. White or brown or even piebald steeds in such a case were not to be thought of.

"On Wednesday," we read, the procession "arrived at the George Inn, Windsor, where a room hung with black and decorated with escutcheons was prepared to receive the coffin. Mrs. Coutts attended as chief mourner. The procession started on Thursday," and this is the last reference in *The Morning Post* to Thomas Coutts. *Le Roi est mort! Vive la Reine!* For the next fifteen years, Mrs. Coutts received the loyal allegiance of the organ of all that was aristocratic.

The *Post*, as became its functions, devoted itself with ardour to the garnering of paragraphs relative to the absorbing subject. We are told on March 2, that, "Among the collection of prints at Colnaghi's is a volume of engraved theatrical portraits. . . . Appended to that of Miss Mellon is added the following note in the handwriting of Mr. Coutts: 'When she married Thomas Coutts, Esq., banker of the Strand, which proved the greatest blessing of his life, and made him the happiest of men.—T. C.' "

Anything that concerned Mrs. Coutts, now "the richest widow" in Great Britain, was, of course, of supreme importance, and on March 3 the *Post* printed the following: "Upon the Countess of Guilford she has settled £10,000 per annum, an annuity to the same amount on the Marchioness of Bute, with £10,000 to her two children; and Lady Burdett is also to have a very large sum, the exact amount

of which has not yet been stated. . . . Exclusively of the immediate great property in cash, of which Mrs. Coutts becomes possessed, she is to have the preponderating share in the banking house which her lamented husband enjoyed and which is of itself a most capital fortune."



From a contemporary caricature (see Introduction).



## CHAPTER XVIII

The attacks upon Mrs. Coutts—*John Bull's* banter—The first grand fêté at Holly Lodge—The "vails" of the servants—Mrs. Coutts's first tour in Scotland—An absurd canard—She visits Sir Walter Scott—The formidable rotinuo—The rudeness to her of Scott's lady guests—C. R. Leslie's version of the story—Sir Walter partly to blame—Her notoriety reaches Scotland.

FOR eighteen months of her widowhood Mrs. Coutts lived a retired life, and she did not come much under the public eye until the fêté at Holly Lodge in July 1824, the first of the elaborate summer festivities which became the talk of London, and which, thanks to the magniloquent descriptions published in some of the newspapers, certainly laid her open to criticism. The result was a series of attacks which were carried on for years with a malicious persistency difficult to parallel, and when Mrs. Coutts became the Duchess of St. Albans the taunts of her vilifiers increased in number and in bitterness, in many cases exceeding the bounds of decency. It is questionable whether any other woman, save Queen Caroline, was ever subjected to so pertinacious a persecution.

It does not appear, either as Mrs. Coutts or as the Duchess of St. Albans, that she at any time attempted to check or reply to her tormentors. Actions for libel were not in favour. Coarseness was a weapon with which almost every public person was assailed, and perhaps the victims were not so disturbed as they certainly would be to-day under similar circumstances. Harriot at all events pursued the jollity of the life which suited her, entertained her aristocratic friends on a regal scale, patronised the theatre, travelled with the retinue of

a princess, and bestowed largess whenever she was in the mood.

Probably without her assailants, Harriot Mellon's story would lose a little of its interest. The attacks were certainly typical of the manners of the age, and at times, it must be confessed, they furnish very sprightly reading. They certainly cannot be ignored. The title of Percy Wyndham's book fairly represents its contents. It runs thus: *Mr. Percy Wyndham's Strictures on an Imposter and Old Actress, formerly Bet the Pot Girl, alias the Banker's sham Widow, with Particulars of her Appearance at the Bar of Bow Street, of the Child Manufactory at Highgate, and Madam's Sleeping at the Horns at Kennington.*"

The first twenty pages contain nothing but vulgar abuse, of which Sir Coutts Trotter, one of the executors of Mr. Coutts's will, comes in for a large share. Mr. Wyndham particularly wants to know if Sir Coutts has carried out the provisions of the will, "for Harriot had plenty settled upon her in Mr. Coutts's lifetime to Live Well either at Holly Lodge, Highgate, or at the House she has taken for her Widow residence up a court in Richmond so as to be able to overlook the Tea Gardens of and the Companies at the Castle Tavern, and that the ignoramus Tea sippers in the Castle Tavern Tea Gardens may in return be gratified with being allowed to look over the fence wall that separates Harriot's Yard from the Tea Gardens so that she may exhibit herself publicly in private, though she has been obliged to withdraw from the Public in Public, as an Actress."

The above is a mild sample of Mr. Wyndham's style. In his *Strictures on a Slanderous and Indecent Book* pretended to have been written "By a Person of the First Respectability" he uses much coarser language. He goes over the old ground of the lottery prize and audaciously asserts that Mr. Raymond "was the man who, until his Death wrote all the fulsome lying puffs of *Mock Charity, etc. etc., and paid* to obtain their insertion in the newspapers with

money provided from and out of the sham Ten Thousand pound prize." Harriot's friend Wewitzer, termed "Poor good-tempered Punning, old Wewitzer," is represented as having been the go-between to "pop the question of Terms to Miss and having also been entrusted with a cheque on the firm *in Blank!* to be filled up according to the conscience of Miss, now *Publicly* and undisguisedly volunteering to become a *Madame*, on the condition of *also* having a further annual sum of One Thousand Pounds paid her each Birth day !!!"

Following this is a farrago of scandalous rubbish, with endless repetitions, in which "Mrs. Olive Wilmot Serres, claiming to be Princess of Cumberland," and the "Late Duchess of Kingston" are lugged in to point the moral and adorn the tale. A vulgar and possibly distorted version of an episode at Holly Lodge in which Miss Mellon's companion figured is given at great length, and everything that malice could suggest is made use of to vilify Mrs. Coutts and drag her name in the dirt.

This "companion" is not to be confounded with Miss Goddard, who lived with Harriot Mellon in the early days in Little Russell Street and continued to be with her for many years, but was a Miss Stevenson, who is thus alluded to by the "Person of the Highest Respectability": "Miss Mellon received under her protection a young female whom she greatly cherished; who was her almost inseparable companion, accompanying her in her travels and sleeping in the same chamber. This young girl, whilst she resided at Holly Lodge, acted very indiscreetly, although unknown to her kind protectress. . . . This circumstance gave rise to innumerable tales of slander levelled at Miss Mellon, who was compelled to send the frail fair one away, but to whom she continued a liberal support. According to the statement of Mr. —— this female became the deadliest foe of her kind benefactress, invented the most gross and wicked calumnies, joining the cabals of her secret

enemies, and occasioned the greatest unhappiness to Miss Mellon. In short, if these things are truths this young girl acted in the vilest manner, and like the viper, stung the benevolent bosom in which she had been cherished. "The Person" may be right. It is certainly very remarkable that Harriot Mellon with all her good qualities should have had so many enemies.

Blackmail, no doubt, was the motive in more than one case. Shortly after the death of Mr. Coutts a man named Mitford waited upon her with the opening chapters of an effusion which he threatened to publish unless he was paid. She refused the fellow's demand, and he produced it in a magazine started by Westmacott called *The Gazette of Fashion*, under the title of "The Banker's Widow." Two instalments—the personification of dulness—appeared, and *The Gazette of Fashion* came to an end just as the author of "The Banker's Widow" was getting into his stride, for in the third instalment he promised to enter into the real story of his romance—the "Memoir of Harriot Pumpkin." Three years went over before this silly mass of dreariness found its way into print. Beyond its objectionable title-page there was little in it to disturb Mrs. Coutts's equanimity.

*John Bull* soon discovered that Mrs. Coutts could be made a valuable asset. She was a target particularly suitable for the arrows of Theodore Hook, who was then revelling in the humours of the *Ramsbottom Letters*, and was in the vein to make butts of middle-aged ladies outside the aristocracy. A licensed jester could hardly resist having a "dig" at such a fatuous paragraph as this which appeared in *The Morning Chronicle* of May 19, 1824:

"Mrs. Coutts," we read, "on her return from the Italian Opera on Saturday night nearly met with a serious accident—and indeed it is feared she did sustain some injury. On entering her room she threw herself suddenly into her usual chair, when, unhappily, she found that either from intention or

negligence a broken flower glass was beneath her ; she rose up precipitately and endeavoured to trace the mischief to its source. Her efforts, however, that night were ineffectual, and although assisted on the Sunday by the advice and influence of a worthy magistrate, the matter still remained in darkness. Some oaths were administered on the occasion, but we have reason to believe there was more of accident than design in the affair."

The paragraph was quoted in *John Bull* under the heading " Extraordinary and Mysterious Affair " and with the following bantering comments :

" The extraordinary state of uncertainty in which Mrs. Coutts appears even at this moment to remain as to whether she hurt herself or not is beautifully and pathetically described in the above article—her doubt and apprehension, it is true, remind us of the fox who once had a wound—but we trust that by the aid and action of the worthy magistrate alluded to the fact will be at last ascertained, and the mischief traced to its source.

" There certainly appears a still more unpleasant suspicion on the lady's mind and which is of a more serious nature—we mean that the wound, if wound there is, was neglected by design and that she fell into a trap which some person set for her. ' Why should this be ? has anybody a desire to remove Mrs. Coutts from this life—and is such a body in her own house ? Surely not—we hope that reason, reflection, and a little sticking-plaister will soon set the matter all to rights ; we have no doubt it must have been painful at the time, but Mrs. Coutts should divest her mind of all suspicion of assassination.'

Whether Mrs. Coutts actually complained of this piece of fooling which the paragraph really justified, or Hook invented her wrath—he was an adept at such devices—it is impossible to say, but the issue of the following week contained this : " Mrs. Coutts is outrageously angry at our observation upon her mishap ; we certainly should not have alluded to

the affair had not her tale been printed and published in the *Chronicle*—an article of intelligence is fair matter of comment, and therefore we noticed it; for our own parts we disbelieved the story that Mrs. Coutts could have been cut by a bottle, and therefore thought it right to elicit some further information. It seems, however, to be true, which naturally makes the lady the more sore.”

Mrs. Coutts was bent upon strengthening her position in society, and she took the world of fashion by storm with the July fête already alluded to. The *Post* wrote that “Notwithstanding the unfavourable state of the weather, it was attended by about seven hundred Ladies and Gentlemen of the first rank and fashion in the country. The guests began to assemble soon after twelve o’clock and continued increasing until six; among the number were their Royal Highnesses the Duke of York and Prince Leopold, the Princes Leiningen and Gortschakoff, the Dukes of Wellington, St. Albans, and De Guiche; Duchesses: Richmond, Leinster, and De Guiche; Marquises: Hertford, Tavistock, Winchester, Waterford, Huntly, and Tweeddale; Marchionesses: Stafford, Winchester, Tavistock, (Dowagers), Lansdowne and Waterford; Earls: Lauderdale, Gower, Grey, Rosslyn, Bristol, Morley, Bessborough, Carysfort, Dartmouth, and Rochford; Countesses: Guildford, Morley, Essex, Bristol, Charlemont, Carysfort, Harrowby, Poulet, Galloway, and De Real. At this entertainment each of the servants of the company received two shillings from Mrs. Coutts’s treasurer to purchase refreshments in the houses of the victuallers in the neighbourhood. More than £200 was thus circulated on this occasion alone, in extending the sphere of the Lady’s hospitality.”

It will thus be seen that on this basis of calculation the coachmen and footmen numbered 2,000, representing, in those days of “vails,” an enormous tax upon hospitality. Mrs. Coutts took a business-like view of the position and under the circumstances

acted very diplomatically, as she was not bound to "tip" her guests' servants, though it was incumbent upon her friends to "remember" hers. The power of the servants' hall, though not so supreme as in the eighteenth century, still acted as a powerful leverage in social advancement, and in all probability Mrs. Coutts's liberality was not wasted.

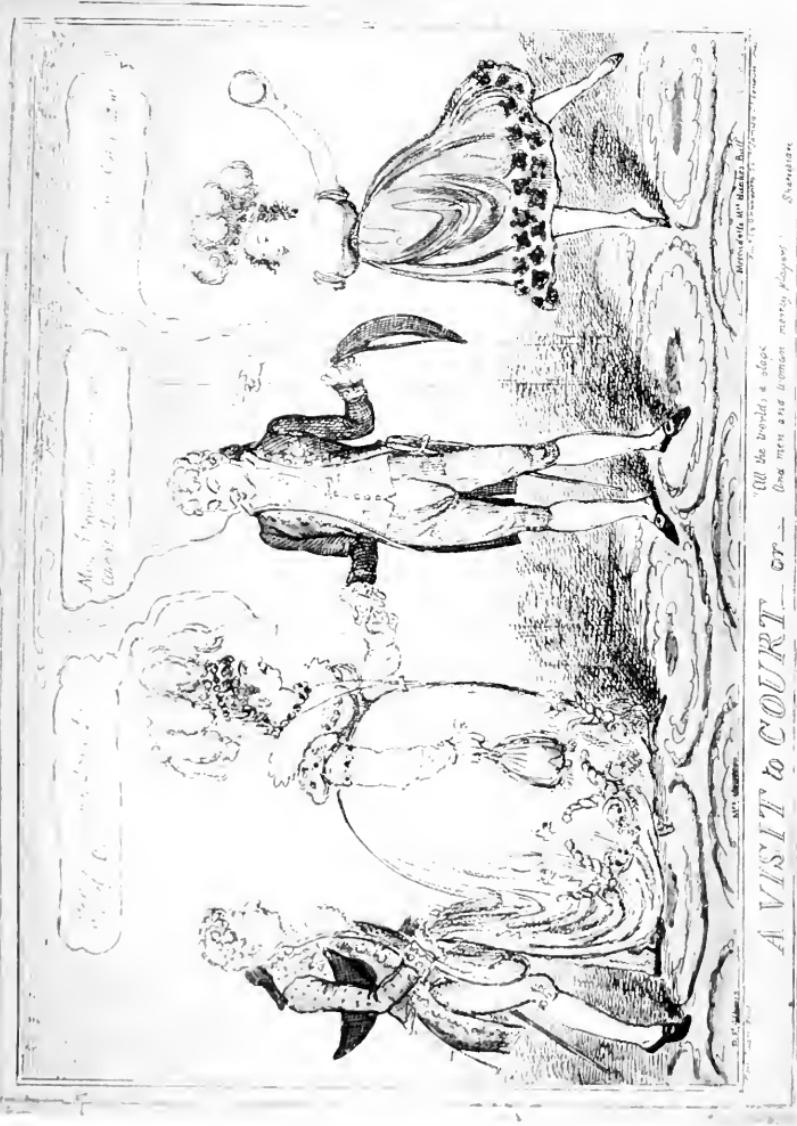
Five years later *The Court Journal*, in the flowery hybrid English which distinguished the fashionable journalese of the period, said of this festivity that "It was in 1824 that Mrs. Coutts first shone forth a resplendent luminary in our fashionable hemisphere. In consequence of Lord Sandon's marriage, Lady Harrowby had taken her by the hand, and in conjunction with Lady Stafford and the more influential members of Mrs. Coutts' family who had profited by her Grace's liberality, and she was pronounced *bon ton* by a fiat not to be gainsaid. Exuberant as was the first fête at Holly Lodge . . . nothing was known of it till a few days beforehand, but when proclaimed all were dying to be of the *élite*. . . . Fêtes of equal magnificence have since taken place, but I question if a similar constellation of the supreme *bon ton* has shone with such lustre on any subsequent occasion."

This is no exaggeration. At the subsequent fêtes noblemen in plenty were to be found, but their ladies did not always accompany them. They attended on the first occasion because they wanted to gratify their curiosity, but afterwards were not eager to accept the widow's mite. A royal duke or two could always be reckoned upon, but they could come with safety as they were not bound to return her hospitality.

Towards the autumn of 1824 Mrs. Coutts toured through the north of England and Scotland, dispensing her gifts as she went, and in consequence was received everywhere with effusion. At Edinburgh she presented the Lord Provost with a silver vase. She also gave £150 to the different charitable institutions. It was in consequence of this generosity that

an absurd rumour was spread about that the freedom of the city was to be conferred upon her, causing *The Scotsman* to protest. "From the insuperable objections to such a proceeding," it wrote indignantly, "we take upon us *without authority* to contradict the report. We are morally certain our present rulers are incapable of so prostituting civic honours."

During her tour she visited Sir Walter Scott, which was the correct thing to do on the part of any traveller of importance. Lockhart in his *Life of Scott* deals with this visit in considerable detail, and incidentally confirms the allegations of elaborate pomp attached to Mrs. Coutts's journeying in state about the country. Scott had visited her in London, so that they were not strangers, "but although," writes Lockhart, "she was considerate enough not to come on him with all her retinue, leaving four of the seven carriages with which she travelled at Edinburgh, the appearance of only three coaches, each drawn by four horses, was rather trying to poor Lady Scott. They contained Mrs. Coutts, her future lord, the Duke of St. Albans, one of his Grace's sisters, a *dame de compagnie* [doubtless Miss Goddard], a brace of physicians, for it had been considered that one doctor might himself be disabled in the course of an expedition so adventurous, and besides other menials of every grade, two bedchamber women for Mrs. Coutts's own person; she requiring to have this article also in duplicate because in her widowed condition she was fearful of ghosts, and there must be one Abigail for the service of the toilet and a second to keep watch by night. With a little puzzling and cramming all this train found accommodation; but it so happened that there were already in the house several ladies, Scotch and English, of high birth and rank who felt by no means disposed to assist their host and hostess in making Mrs. Coutts's visit agreeable to her. . . . Sir Walter during dinner did everything in his power to counteract this influence of *the evil eye* and something to overawe it, but the spirit of mischief had been



From a contemporary caricature (see Introduction).



fairly stirred, and it was easy to see that Mrs. Coutts followed these noble dames to the drawing-room in by no means that complacent mood which was customarily sustained, doubtless by every blandishment of obsequious flattery in this mistress of millions."

Sir Walter was terribly upset. He evidently dreaded the visit of the lady and her pretentious belongings, and was much concerned at the prospect of three days of feminine warfare. He took his courage in both hands and appealed to "the youngest and gayest and cleverest, who was also the highest in rank (a lovely Marchioness)." "I said to her," he told Lockhart, "'I want to speak a word with you about Mrs. Coutts. We have known each other a good while and I know you won't take anything I can say in ill part. It is, I hear, not uncommon among the fine ladies in London to be very well pleased to accept invitations and even sometimes to hunt after them to Mrs. Coutts's grand balls and fêtes, and then if they meet her in any private circle to practise on her the delicate manœuvre called *tipping the cold shoulder*. This you agree with me is shabby, but it is nothing new either to you or to me that fine people will do shabbinesses for which beggars might blush if they once stoop so low as to poke for tickets. I am sure for the world you would not do such a thing; but you must permit me to take the great liberty of saying that I think the style you have all received my guest, Mrs. Coutts, in this evening is to a certain extent a sin of the same order. You were all told a couple of days ago that I had accepted her visit and that she would arrive to-day to stay three nights. Now if any of you had not been disposed to be of my party at the same time with her there was plenty of time for you to have gone away before she came; and as none of you moved, and it was impossible to fancy that any of you would remain out of mere curiosity, I thought I had a perfect right to calculate on your having made up your minds to help me out with her.'"

No doubt the reproof was merited, but Sir Walter was not wholly blameless, as will presently be seen. However, "the beautiful peeress" took the matter in good part, promised to make amends, and when subsequently he asked her "to sing a particular song *because* he thought it would please Mrs. Coutts the Marchioness made answer that nothing could gratify her more than to please Mrs. Coutts." Mrs. Coutts's brow smoothed and in the course of half an hour she was as happy and easy as ever she was in her life, rattling away at comical anecdotes of her early theatrical years and joining in the chorus of Sir Adam's "Laird of Cockpen."

This is all very well, but the version given by C. R. Leslie, R.A., who was staying with Sir Walter at the time, does not quite correspond. Leslie puts Lockhart right in the year, which he says was 1824 and not 1825, as Scott's biographer has it. But their chief difference is in the effect which the rudeness of the ladies of rank had on Mrs. Coutts. Leslie says :

"Now I have no doubt Sir Walter did remonstrate with the beautiful Lady Compton (who was not then a Marchioness), for I remember that Lady Compton was very polite to Mrs. Coutts in the evening and sat down to the piano to accompany her in a song which she made an ineffectual attempt to sing, but could not utter a note. Her wounded spirit, in fact, was not healed, and instead of staying 'her three days' she slept at Abbotsford but one night after the night of her arrival and went away the next morning.

"Stewart Newton was at Abbotsford at the time. About a year afterwards he was taken by a friend to one of Mrs. Coutts' fêtes at Holly Lodge, and on saying that he had 'the honour of meeting her at Sir Walter Scott's.' she said, 'Oh, I remember, it was when those horrible women were there. Sir Walter was very kind and did all in his power, but I could not stay in the house with them.'

"I believe the rudeness Mrs. Coutts suffered at

Abbotsford was chiefly occasioned by what had occurred before she came. She was expected the day before she did arrive ; the dinner hour, seven o'clock, came, but not Mrs. Coutts ; at first nobody could feel aggrieved that Sir Walter would not allow dinner to be served. But no doubt the ladies (two of them titled ladies) thought it too much that dinner was deferred until nine o'clock, and might have been longer postponed had not a messenger arrived from Mrs. Coutts to say that she was delayed on the road by the want of horses and could not reach Abbotsford that night."

Apparently it did not occur to Sir Walter that he was treating his other guests rudely by keeping them waiting two hours for their dinner whether for Mrs. Coutts or anybody else. When the great lady did arrive with her impedimenta—though cut down to half, her *entourage* and its belongings must have been a terrible nuisance—no doubt there was an amount of fuss which did not tend to conciliate the ladies of title. The truth is, Scott was not altogether free from snobbery. Lockhart commenting with some prolixity on the incident admits as much. "I dare not deny that he set more of his affections during great part of his life upon worldly things, wealth among others, than might have become such an intellect."

This is a mild way of putting things. It is impossible to forgive Scott his toadyish request of George IV on board the royal yacht in the roads of Leith, that the King "would condescend to bestow on him the glass out of which his Majesty had just drunk his health ; and this being granted the precious vessel was immediately wrapped up and carefully deposited in what he conceived was the safest part of his dress." One feels a grim satisfaction in the retribution that swiftly followed. On reaching home he found Crabbe waiting for him, and in his excited greeting of his brother poet he forgot the priceless glass in his pocket, sat down and smashed it to

atoms. “As for the scratch that accompanied it,” Lockhart drily remarks, “its scar was of no great consequence, as even when mounting the *cat-dath* or battle garment of the Celtic Club he adhered like his hero warmly to *the trews*.”

That Mrs. Coutts was held in high respect by poor and working people, no doubt on account of her charities, is evident by what Leslie says later on in the following: “Constable the publisher spent a day at Abbotsford while I was there. He told Sir Walter that Meg Dodds—a name given to the mistress of an inn halfway between Edinburgh and Abbotsford and who was supposed to have furnished the original of that character—said Sir Walter had ill-obliged her by not giving her notice that so great a lady as Mrs. Coutts was coming, in order that she might be prepared to receive her properly. She was taken by surprise when she ought to have been informed that the greatest woman in all England was on her way to visit the greatest man in all Scotland.”

## CHAPTER XIX

Mrs. Coutts championed by *The British Lion*—*The Age* starts its campaign—How Mrs. Coutts met Lord Burford—Mrs. Coutts attends the Drawing-room; severe comments of *John Bull* thereon—The second *déjeune* of the season at Holly Lodge—Enthusiasm of *The Morning Post*—Death of the Duke of St. Albans and succession of Lord Burford—Mrs. Coutts goes to Scotland with the Duke—Indignation of *John Bull*—Rumour of her marriage in Edinburgh—*The Secret Memoirs of Harriot Pumpkin*—Sir Walter Scott's defence of Mrs. Coutts—Monckton Milnes's low estimate of the Duke—Mrs. Coutts at Brighton—The adulation of the local press.

THROUGHOUT 1824, *John Bull* lost few opportunities of gibing at Mrs. Coutts, but without much effect on the exuberance of the newspapers which delighted in prominently chronicling her doings. The Brighton correspondent of *The Morning Post* particularly distinguished himself. Mrs. Coutts greatly favoured the watering-place made famous by the Prince Regent, and divided with Mrs. Fitzherbert the attentions of the press. She stayed here for some time during the winter of 1824, occasionally going to London, each visit being duly recorded. Towards the spring the correspondent grew sad. “It is much feared,” he writes on March 27, 1825, “that Mrs. Coutts, for whose presence and charities the indigent poor have come to pray, has changed her intention and will not return to Byham House this spring if much before the autumn of the year.” On April 5 the poor man's fears were justified, but he broke the news gently by cautiously announcing that as Byham House was let it appeared as if “the benevolent lady does not purpose returning hither quite so soon as she intended.” On April 8 he could conceal the truth no longer, and he wrote: “Mrs.

Coutts, we regret to learn, will delay her return to this place until the autumn."

Naturally, as the movements of Mrs. Coutts appeared to be as important as the movements of the Court, *John Bull* did not cease to poke its fun; and at length on April 17 *The British Lion* rose in her defence and in the course of a lengthy article cried indignantly: "We assert that the unceasing worrying which Mrs. Coutts experiences at the hands of *John Bull* is as uncalled for as it is unmanly, brutal, and disgusting. About twice a month latterly this lady has figured in the columns of the newspaper we have mentioned, either connected with some ribald jest on her possible re-marrying or some unwarrantable allusion to the *supposed* indiscretions of her early life. . . . Does the *John Bull*, which is always *affecting* (for it gives not a tittle of proof, but what makes against the pretence) that its intercourse is with the noble and the great—does it dream that systematic and wanton personal attacks on such an individual as Mrs. Coutts can be acceptable, nay, can be construed as anything short of a direct insult to the royal and illustrious personages who are not ashamed (and very rightly so) of the society of that lady? *They, however, who are thus insulted will deserve it all if they continue to patronize the print which insults them.*"

It was not a very effective reply, and probably prompted *The Age* in its first number, published May 15, 1825, to go one better than *John Bull*, but in a more solemn strain. "If people," it declared severely, "will thrust themselves forward and create public enquiry, they must expect public controversy. Why will that poor foolish woman make herself so notorious, or why will her friends do it for her? When the papers talk of her boundless charity and we know she never gave away a shilling but for the sake of ostentation, and has often paid as much for puffing as the sum puffed, we laugh—but when they will tell us of any *really* good action she ever

did in her life we may manage to shed a tear. From the length of a purse she is introduced into the highest circles of the land . . . and as a great catch by way of winding up, sets her cap at my Lord Burford ! ”

Lord Burford was afterwards the Duke of St. Albans, and from the allusion to him the gossip of the town had already coupled his name with that of the banker’s widow.

Mrs. Baron-Wilson is unconsciously amusing in relating how the two first met. It was at a large dinner party ; the guests were kept waiting a long time, a proceeding which Mrs. Coutts thought so tiresome “that she enquired the reason, when she was told they were waiting for the Duke of St. Albans and his son, Lord Burford,” and that the latter “was intended for the great heiress, Miss —— then present and that the dinner was given on purpose to make them better acquainted.” When the dinner was over and “every one had regained their good humour,” the ladies retired, and in due time were joined by the gentlemen. Lord Burford (described as “a retired, gentlemanly young man of three-and-twenty”), instead of devoting himself to the great heiress, “took his position beside herself (to Mrs. Coutts’s ‘great amazement’), where he remained for the rest of the evening ; and she soon discovered a bond of sympathy in their mutually great admiration of Shakespeare, a point on which she was so much an idolater that she scarcely accorded any merit to modern poetry.”

The “gentlemanly young man” evidently played his cards well, for Mrs. Baron-Wilson assures us that “after some time it would seem that the other matrimonial project for Lord Burford was abandoned and the late Duke is said to have afforded every encouragement to his son’s success with Mrs. Coutts, of whom also his young and lovely daughters, the Ladies Charlotte and Maria Beauclerk, were frequent guests.”

The matter whetted the appetite of the scribbling gadflies, and *John Bull* on June 5, chaffing the Society of Arts in regard to certain prizes for inventions, saw an opportunity of pillorying Mrs. Coutts, and with not the most delicate humour announced that “Mrs. Coutts received the great golden cornucopia for her invention for transporting of atmospheres by means of large bags. The plan has been successfully acted upon, and the Sun and Air of St. Albans may be found at this moment in a process of adaptation to some extensive Melon beds at Highgate.”

Another journal slightlying remarked that “Mrs. Coutts entertained a very *snug* and select party at her Dairy at Highgate on Sunday last. Lord Burford was the lady’s most distinguished guest. Miss Stephens warbled her delightfully plaintive and wild wood notes in the grove for the entertainment of the company.”

Meanwhile Mrs. Coutts was gradually drawing nearer the aristocratic circles, admission to which she no doubt coveted, as her name figures in the list of guests at the parties of the Duke of Devonshire and other elevated personages. Meanwhile she was junketing at Holly Lodge. *The Morning Post*, ever on the watch, burst out early in June with: “On Wednesday last Mrs. Coutts gave a public breakfast *à la Fourchette* at her beautiful villa. At half-past three the visitants approached the hill in splendid equipages and four. At half-past four they sat down to the repast, which consisted of the most sumptuous dishes, and the most rare fruits, ices, confectioneries, wines, etc. At six the dancing commenced with quadrilles and waltzes; they were kept up with great spirit until seven. At eight the party broke up.” Society worked hard at its pleasures then; in these degenerate days a fashionable garden party, which now does duty for a *fête champêtre*, consists chiefly of ices, strawberries and cream, champagne-cup, and languid conversation.

On June 8 Mrs. Coutts attended the Royal

Drawing-room. It was not her first appearance there, as Mrs. Baron-Wilson, writing of a previous occasion, without giving any date, tells of how "George IV received Mrs. Coutts with the most marked kindness, and his amiable sister . . . addressed some phrases of courteous encouragement to Mrs. Coutts, who, already agitated by her novel position, was nearly affected to tears by the considerate kindness of the princess." Whether tears were always so ready with Mrs. Coutts as her biographer would have us believe may be doubted, but if she shed any at what appeared in *John Bull* four days after her presentation at Court they must have been tears of anger.

"We have received," ran the article, "several letters calling upon us to notice in terms of the strongest reprehension the presentation at the Drawing-room of a lady upon whom we have at times felt it our duty to make some severe, although, as we considered them, just remarks.

"We must decline fulfilling the requests of our correspondents for this reason—whatever histories we may have read, whatever anecdotes we may be in possession of relative to the individual in question, we are now convinced they must be false. The reception of a Lady of large fortune in general society may, in these days, be but an equivocal testimonial of her merits, or her virtue, and while this Lady was merely received at the houses of those who, pleased with novelty and gaiety, gave *her* entertainments in return for those which she had given *them*, we saw no reason to question the evidence we possessed, or the facts which we had accumulated touching her conduct and character; but the case is now different, the Lady has been presented and received at the Court of St. James, therefore we are certain that we must have been misled, and we should consider ourselves as committing not only a shameful violence towards her, but an act of the greatest disrespect in the highest quarters if we presumed to set our humble

knowledge in array against the unequivocal result of an examination into the Lady's pretensions which must have taken place before she could have appeared as the associate of all that is great and good in the Palace of the King of England."

If ever there was a case of dissembling one's love while kicking the loved one downstairs it is surely this.

It was fortunate for Mrs. Coutts's peace of mind that this back-handed onslaught appeared on June 12 and not on the 10th, as on this day she gave another *déjeune*. To quote the enthusiastic *Post* of the following day, it was "a breakfast of one of the most sumptuous and luxurious description," and further, that "the company seemed highly delighted with the entertainment and polite attention of the hospitable hostess." The *Post* evidently required time to do justice to the magnificence of the function, for not until the 13th was it able to give full particulars and a list of the "titled personages present at the fête, including a couple of dukes and Prince Leopold." We gather that at four o'clock Miss Stephens sang "Sweet Echo" in the woods "accompanied by Mr. Price on the flute from the distant shrubberies," while the *déjeune*, as might be expected, "boasted everything that money could buy." The Duke of Gordon made a little speech to this effect: "I have by the blessing of God just attained my ninetieth year and I feel highly honoured in proposing the health of Mrs. Coutts with three times three."

This was all very satisfactory, but what seems to have pleased the representative of the *Post* more than anything was the servants. There were fifty of them "uniformly dressed," and "by the same judicious arrangement as last year every servant received a 2s. ticket for refreshments to be obtained at the neighbouring inns at Highgate, Hampstead, and Hornsey." One hardly dares to suggest such a thing, but may it not be that the gentleman who represented the *Post* was a recipient of a two-shilling

ticket? One could have wished that he had been more explicit. How came the servants to be "uniformly dressed" unless they belonged to the Holly Lodge household? If not, fifty is a paltry number in comparison with the two thousand of the year before. Be this as it may, what with dancing and supper at eleven o'clock everything went off remarkably well and "by 12 o'clock all were gone"—words suggesting a spirit of thankfulness which supports our theory of the dual occupation of the gentleman of the *Post*.

Mrs. Coutts was very much in evidence during the summer of 1825, and the *Post* was kept busy. On June 25: "Mrs. Coutts, with a select party of ladies, honoured Drury Lane with their presence last night." On July 2: "Mrs. Coutts has very kindly sent to Mrs. Brandon £10 in assistance of her benefit," and the donation is repeated in the list of subscriptions annexed to the paragraph. On July 20 she was present at a "splendid party" given by the Marquis of Hertford—Thackeray's Marquis of Steyne—causing *John Bull* to observe that "in reply to an observation of hers upon the splendour and magnificence of the furniture and decorations the poet Rogers was supposed to have remarked that 'besides splendour there was so much good taste in the ornaments, everything in the rooms was so chaste and delicate.'"

In July the Duke of St. Albans died, and Lord Burford, who was under so great an obligation to Shakespeare for the bond of sympathy "between him and Mrs. Coutts," succeeded to the title. Somewhere about September, Mrs. Coutts set out (as already mentioned) on a sort of royal tour with the Duke and his sister, a retinue of servants, and a physician, throughout England and "her favourite Scotland," to quote the inconsequent Mrs. Baron-Wilson. Several stages of the "progress" were paragraphed in due course, much to the indignation of *John Bull*, which lashed out in this fashion:

"The following is gravely inserted in *The Courier*

of Friday in its best type and most advantageous place :

“ ‘Mrs. Coutts and *suite* accompanied by his Grace the Duke of Saint Albans arrived at the George Inn in Leek about five o’clock on Saturday evening. During their stay they HONOURED Richard Gant, Esq., with a visit, and took their departure about seven o’clock the same evening for Eaton Hall, the seat of Sir Edmund Antrobus, where they will remain a few days and then proceed on their way to Scotland.

“ ‘Liverpool, October 12. Apartments have been ordered at the King’s Arms Hotel, in this town for the DUKE OF ST. ALBANS, MRS. COUTTS AND SUITE.’

“ Now upon this we have a very few words to say. We have not any, we can have no animosity towards Mrs. Coutts, neither envy nor jealousy can mingle in the feelings which her elevation by marriage with Mr. Coutts in his dotage excites in our minds—we pass over all her early life—we have already said that her admission at Court negatives at once all the stories told of her—all her exploits with poor Miss Stevenson—all the histories of Mr. Raymond, and fifty other people, and damnifies as forgeries all the letters which are or were in the possession of a Cheltenham banker—we are satisfied that she is as virtuous and charitable as she says she is herself in the newspapers, but we would ask her minions and myrmidons if they suppose the world will bear to hear of Mrs. Coutts and *suite* accompanied by the Duke of St. Albans doing this and doing that? We say No: we tell them that they are making this poor lady perfectly ridiculous and nothing else—let Mrs. Coutts stand fairly in society as the widow of a banker—we cast into oblivion all the calumnies which her gracious reception at St. James has falsified—put her as Mr. Coutts’ widow, and *then* see the absurdity of such proceedings. . . . Mrs. Coutts after a long acquaintance with poor old Mr. Coutts, got him to marry her the day after his wife’s death; and in God’s name let her enjoy her wealth—let her do good—let her be happy, but do

not let her imagine that money can alter her real character and attributes. . . . Let her see and feel that the Countess of Derby, the lovely Countess of Craven, and the exemplary Lady Thurlow, who were placed upon the purest principles in the rank which they hold, are known only in their own circles where their amiable qualities and excellent principles are felt and appreciated without advertising in the public newspapers. Let her feel this—let her dismiss Miss Goddard and Dr. Somebody . . . let her put down her secretaries and physicians and all the suite . . . let her be in fact what she is not in face, *plain* Mrs. Coutts, and we shall delight in her enjoyments and be rejoiced in her conviviality ; let her marry the Duke of St. Albans or Velluti or anybody else she likes and let her go her way, but do not let common sense and common decency be insulted by giving her, for the sake of her money, attributes and characteristics which never can belong to her under any circumstances whatever.”

An indictment sufficiently scathing but with a groundwork of common sense. Save for the dragging in of allusions to past incidents of doubtful authenticity, and evidently based on Percy Wyndham’s *Strictures*, the article might even be approved as a much-needed rebuke to the papers which fostered Mrs. Coutts’s vanity and encouraged her love of display. A week later *John Bull* returned to the charge. “‘The only very important piece of intelligence which we have been able to obtain,’ ” it writes sarcastically, “‘is that . . . ‘Mrs. Coutts and *suite*, accompanied by the Earl of Lauderdale, spent the forenoon of Thursday in Perth and visited Balthayock in the afternoon—in the evening the party proceeded by Dunkeld to Taymouth Castle, the seat of the Earl of Breadalbane.’ ” This is extracted verbatim from *The Morning Post* of Friday. This mummery *must be* put down ; it is as disgusting as it is disgraceful.”

*John Bull’s* protests made no difference. The newspapers continued to record the trivialities of

the “progress,” and among the items was this announcement in *The Morning Chronicle* of November 6: “A correspondent informs us that Mrs. Coutts was married on Thursday last to the Duke of St. Albans. The Earl of Lauderdale was present.” It was not true. The *Chronicle* had been hoaxed, and *The Courier*, chuckling over its contemporary’s credulity, remarked with solemn banter: “We are surprised that the papers generally have not noticed the circumstance of Mrs. Coutts having become the Duchess of St. Albans. *The Morning Chronicle* having on this occasion the advantage of them all in priority of information announced the important fact on Wednesday last. It seems, according to the *Chronicle*, that the nuptials of the happy pair took place on the preceding Thursday at Edinburgh in the presence of the Earl of Lauderdale. Now why the advancement of this Lady in rank should thus be hushed up we do not know, but, strange to say, so it is, for the Edinburgh paper since received mentions nothing about the wedding. This must be from malice, we should think, for it cannot be supposed that any one would attempt hoaxing *The Morning Chronicle*, as the approved sagacity of the Editor in detecting fabricated letters would make such an attempt hopeless.”

The possibility of Mrs. Coutts becoming a Duchess once more focussed public attention upon her, and it was probably thought a favourable time for launching another of the fictitious biographies of the one lady of the day, nothing having been published since 1822. This new effort was Mitford’s *Romance* the first two numbers of which had appeared in *The Gazette of Fashion*. It was now published under the unwieldy title of *The Secret Memoirs of Harriot Pumpkin, Celebrated Actress from her Infancy to her . . . Marriage with a Banker . . . with Strictures on Charity without Benevolence—the Art of Swindling a Good Name—Fifteen Shillings for Publishing a Donation of Five!—the Art of Benefit Making; or Devil*

*Drive the Hindmost—Ripe Fruit and the Money-bags—A Scene at the Horns—Scenes at the Cottage—By the Ghost of old Ralph!!!* “Harriot Pumpkin” may be dismissed as being simply vulgar and devoid of interest.

At the end of 1825 there was no secret about the possibility of a marriage between Mrs. Coutts and the Duke of St. Albans. Mrs. Baron-Wilson quotes an extract from the *Journal of Sir Walter Scott*, dated November 25, in which he writes : “Mrs. Coutts with the Duke of St. Albans and Lady Charlotte called to take leave of us. . . . She made me, I believe, her confidant in sincerity ; she had refused him twice and, decidedly, he was merely on the footing of friendship. . . . If the duke marries her, he ensures an immense fortune ; if she marries him she has the first rank. If he marries a woman older than himself by twenty years, she marries a man younger in wit by twenty degrees. I do not think he will dilapidate her fortune ; he seems good and gentle. I do not think she will abuse his softness of disposition—shall I say or of—head ? The disparity of ages concerns no one but themselves ; so they have my consent to marry if they can get each other’s.” Probably this judicial summing up of the pros and cons, if Scott put it before Mrs. Coutts, had its effect, for some six months after she became the Duchess of St. Albans.

Besides hinting at the mental deficiencies of the Duke, Scott in the same entry gives his opinion of the future Duchess, whom he had always found “a kind, friendly woman, without either affectation or insolence in the display of her wealth ; most willing to do good if the means be shown to her . . . so much wealth can hardly be enjoyed without the appearance of ostentation.” Sir Walter does not see that the charge against Mrs. Coutts was not so much her ostentatious displays of wealth as the publicity given to them and to her benevolence, which was so constantly paraded as to become tiresome. Her

personal qualities were no doubt admirable, and Scott epitomises some of them when at the end of the entry he wrote that he retracted his consent as given above unless she remains "burly, brisk, and jolly."

Sir Walter Scott was not alone in his opinion of the softness of the Duke of St. Albans' head. In one of his letters written some time after the marriage, Monekton Milnes mentions how he has been amused by hearing that "the Duke of St. Albans asked the showman of the Siamese boys, who you know are joined together, whether they were brothers!" In another letter he writes: "His grace was rather weak on one part (acting), in which he cut but an indifferent figure. At every opportunity when he could do so unknown to the Duchess he indulged in Shakespearian recitals. When we were at Cheltenham the Duke and Duchess were staying at Pillville. In a large private room (Seymour's) his Grace of St. Albans spouted to his heart's content *Julius Cæsar*, a favourite study: Brutus, St. Albans; Cassius, Seymour. One unlucky day in flounched the Duchess just at the words 'I'd rather be a dog,' etc. A loud voice was heard, 'I wish you were. Mr. Seymour, I am vexed that you should encourage the Duke to make a fool of himself; he knows no more of acting than a goose! No repetition, I beg! Your Grace, the carriage is at the door'—escorting the poor Duke out entirely chap-fallen." A significant touch this. It makes one wonder who in the days of courtship was the suitor—the masterful woman of fifty or the soft-hearted and soft-headed nobleman of five-and-twenty?

*John Bull* did not leave Mrs. Coutts alone while she was on her second tour in Scotland. On November 28 we find the following: "The newspapers inform us that Mrs. Coutts has with her accustomed liberality given the sum of twenty pounds to be distributed among the poor of Edinburgh. The number of persons for whom this splendid donation is



*A Sketch at S'ALBANS, or, Chasing the new Wall Street*

From a contemporary caricature (see Introduction).



intended exceeds thirty-eight thousand. We understand the Lord Rector of Aberdeen has been requested to calculate what sum will fall to the share of each individual partaker of this Thespian largess."

Hook, in his capacity as editor of *John Bull*, was rabid on the subject of Roman Catholicism, and firmly denounced the efforts made to remove the civil and political disabilities under which Catholics suffered until the passing of the Emancipation Act in 1829. Among its numerous attacks was one appearing on December 26, 1825, ridiculing miracles brought about by prayers which were paid for. In the course of the skit, which, with mock seriousness, cites various examples of the miraculous effects brought about we are told that "His Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex, after very short devotion, jumped nimbly out of bed, declined smoking and paid all his tradesmen." "Mr. Brougham was prayed for for seven weeks incessantly without the smallest alteration in his appearance or conduct—at length a striking change was observed in the motion of his nose, and the success . . . was crowned by the learned gentleman's proceeding to the Court of King's Bench and denouncing adultery in the most vigorous language." Brougham's prodigious nose and his advocacy of Queen Caroline are of course palpable hits. "Mr. Samuel Rogers, the banker and poet, after subjecting himself to the necessary preparation, declared that miracle working was *no joke*—that being the only joke the said gentleman ever made in his life."

*John Bull*, it may be mentioned, was continually fathering its own jokes on Rogers and making his supposed witticisms the lash of its satire. Campbell is credited with having miraculously written after a long seclusion "a long poem interesting in its language and full of pathos and feeling. N.B.—The work in question is not yet published." Lastly we have among the miracles wrought: "Mrs. Coutts (who, having paid double was soon affected) sent ten

pounds' worth of blankets to the poor of Edinburgh without sending twenty pounds more to advertise the charity to the newspapers."

The tour in Scotland over, Mrs. Coutts returned to London, to the great satisfaction of the newspapers, which were once more able to paragraph her dinner parties, her musical assemblies, and other funtions. The Brighton correspondent of the *Post* was as amusing as ever in his flutter of excitement and anxiety concerning her movements during her stay at her favourite seaside resort in January and February 1826. He writes with gratitude on January 31: "Mrs. Coutts, whose tour expired a day or two since, has engaged Byham House for another month," and then with bitterness: "The hum of approaching departures, however, is still painfully heard amongst us." He seems to have passed a terrible day shortly after. "Arrangements were made at Byham House for the departure of Mrs. Coutts thence as yesterday, and even the luggage had been attached to the carriages, but it is pleasing to add"—one can imagine the honest fellow sighing with relief—"that a sudden change in determination took place and that that amiable and benevolent Lady is yet remaining with us." But the inevitable arrived and mournfully he recorded on February 23: "The Duke of St. Albans, Lady Charlotte Beauclerk, Mrs. Coutts, etc., have left us for town."

The *Post* was kept pretty busy during the summer of 1826 in doing its duty towards the "fashionables," to quote its pleasantly familiar term. "Mrs. Coutts gave her first ball for the season at her house in Stratton Street on Monday. Nothing could exceed the grandeur and magnificence of the entertainment, which was honoured by the presence of their Royal Highnesses the Dukes of Sussex and Gloucester, and Prince Leopold, and about 700 distinguished fashionables." Mrs. Coutts was not one to do things by halves when eating and drinking were concerned, and

the "fashionables" of to-day may be interested in learning that 'the company sat down at two o'clock,' not to a paltry "cold collation," but to "soups, hot roasts, entries and every delicacy the season affords."

Meanwhile *The Age* had stolen the thunder of *John Bull*, and was even more persistent and certainly much coarser in its fulminations. As a vehicle for pillorying special victims it invented an "Obituary for 1846," and among other items has the following pleasantry : "Died yesterday, the Hereditary Grand Falconer of England, His Grace the Duke of St. Albans, remarkable for many years' constant attachment to the late Mrs. Coutts, without the least idea of possessing her money even in the event of marriage or borrowing it before that ceremony might take place. His Grace's sisters were constant residents in that old lady's family, and at all times with their brother companions in her various travels throughout the British Empire—in one of which about the autumn of the year 1825 the Duke was very unceremoniously 'cut' by his brother Grace of Devon, at a county meeting at Derby, without the slightest explanation—a species of rudeness which at that period appears to have visited our Duke-domes, for very shortly afterwards, proceeding on their tour to Alnwick, the hospitable seat of brother Northumberland, the Falconer experienced precisely the same indignity, and instead of receiving a hearty welcome with 'board and lodging' for at least a month for himself and party a formal note was despatched from 'head quarters' granting permission to the *noble* people to see the place and no more—which certainly does appear somewhat extraordinary." There was more in the same strain, but it need not be quoted. Much neater and with more point was a reference to Lord Holland. It ran :

"Lord Holland is gone to the place whence he sprung  
To be out of the reach of her ladyship's tongue."

*The Age* continued its taunts almost week after

week, but they were clumsy and ineffective in comparison with the adroit thrusts of *John Bull*. Our old friend the Brighton representative of *The Morning Post* is far more amusing : “Mrs. Coutts entertains a Select Dinner Party at her hotel. I have not heard that this Lady as yet has succeeded in engaging a family residence with us for the winter.” Two days later : “Mrs. Coutts and Miss Goddard and Lord and Lady Dudley are remaining with us.” Again in three days’ time : “Mrs. Coutts has left us for town ; I have not heard if that Lady before she left succeeded in hiring a suitable family residence for the winter.” “Between two and three hundred persons of distinction, among them Lord and Lady Dudley Stuart and Mrs. Coutts, were at the Master of the Ceremonies’ first ball at the Old Ship rooms.” “Mrs. Coutts was at a private fashionable ball at the Old Ship, among whom was Miss Wykham the rich heiress.” Miss Wykham was one of the many rich young women to whom the Duke of Clarence—after he had callously discarded Mrs. Jordan, the mother of his sons, whom after he became king he ennobled, and to whom he gave comfortable sinecures at the expense of the nation—proposed in his quest for a wealthy wife.

We extract a few more treasures from the wallet of “our Brighton correspondent” and leave him at peace. “Mrs. Coutts paid a visit to Worthing yesterday, and dined at Parson’s Splendid Sea House Hotel, having previously walked through the various apartments in the capacious edifice and expressed her admiration at the elegant and superior accommodation which they offer to the higher classes of Society.” “Mrs. Coutts and Lady Dudley-Stuart arrived on Monday last to dinner at the Albion Hotel, where they occupy fifteen rooms,” an announcement which moved *The Age* to deliver itself of this refined witticism : “With the dimensions of Lady Dudley-Stuart we are not particularly acquainted, and although we always knew Mrs. Coutts to be what is

styled *vulgo*, a whapper, we could not have imagined such circumstance would ever have compelled her to occupy fifteen rooms!" "Mrs. Coutts has suited herself with a private mansion on the Marine Parade, of which she has taken possession, and where she will give a ball and supper to her fashionable friends this evening." It need hardly be said that "the supper-table embellishments were as fanciful as rich; they equally combined, with a show of opulence, good taste." "Mrs. Coutts left us yesterday morning to celebrate her birthday in London on Saturday next, and the day after to return to her Marine Parade residence. Her domestic establishment and visiting guest remain with us."

*John Bull* was on her track on her return to town, and on the anniversary of her birth came out with this palpable *canard*: "Mrs. Coutts, it seems, was in a prodigious passion at Drury Lane the night the King honoured the theatre with his presence, because she was not admitted by the Royal entrance, through which no person excepting her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent had been allowed to pass, the door having been by command kept closed until His Majesty's arrival. It is imagined that her Eminence will annul the patents of the house and purchase the whole concern from the proprietors and shut it up altogether; so wonderfully irate is she at the inattention to her will and pleasure."

## CHAPTER XX

The marriage of Mrs. Coutts and the Duke of St. Albans—The mania in 1828 for extravagant dinners—The sumptuous suppers at Crockford's—The craze for dancing and *écarté*—The supremacy of the waltz—The Duke of Devonshire's devotion to the dance—The lack of “dancing men” at Almack's and the introduction of the *galopade*—Lady Jersey's persistency and victory—The state coach of the Duchess, and *The Age's* satire upon it—More banquets.

THROUGHOUT 1826 Mrs. Coutts had the Duke of St. Albans continually trotting at her heels. He constantly stayed with her at Brighton, accompanied her wherever she went, and “with Sir John and Lady Dashwood King and suite” attended her on a visit to Essex, where the faithful *Post* informs us she put up “at the Black Boy, Chelmsford, to pay her respects to her tenantry,” and “after making all their hearts glad, Mrs. Coutts departed for her seat at Highgate this day after church.” Really, had the lady been a royal personage, the *Post* could not have done more.

During the season of 1827 the one topic of conversation was the approaching “marriage in high life,” and at last curiosity was gratified by the announcement on June 14 that “Mrs. Coutts' marriage with the Duke of St. Albans will take place next week, for which purpose a special licence has been obtained.” Accordingly the ceremony was performed in Stratton Street on June 16 by the Duke's uncle, the Rev. Lord Frederick Beauclerk—better known as a cricketer than as a divine (he was one of the founders of the M.C.C. and betted on every game)—without any undue publicity. All that Mrs. Baron-Wilson has to say on the matter is: “It is said that immediately after the ceremony the

duchess told the duke that Mr. Parkinson (presumably her solicitor) had her wedding present to offer him, which proved to be £30,000." What the Duke gave his bride is not recorded.

*The Age*, of course, did not let the occasion go by without comment. "Mrs. Coutts," runs one paragraph, "is no more. The poor old lady died yesterday morning at her house in Stratton Street, Piccadilly, and was soon after buried—Chief Mourner, His Grace the Duke of St. Albans." In another part of the same issue it wrote in a vein of severity: "The object of the marriage as far as the lady is concerned is nothing else in the world than Rank—for an alliance with a Dukedom such as that of St. Albans can give her no society she could not command before and does not add to her income more than 5 per cent. to what it was previous to her entering into 'this holy state.' . . . With reference to His Grace of St. Albans there is no feeling of contempt that we do not entertain. His sole object in marrying a woman *old enough to be his mother* is Fortune, and for the possession of this he sacrifices youth, rank, and society, encounters an obloquy he ought never to have been mixed up with, and becomes, in a general sense of the word, departed. . . . We should have thought that the severerebuke experienced by the Noble Duke both in Derbyshire and Northumberland some little time since . . . would have drawn him away from this golden infatuation and have induced him to be content with the humble pittance his title is worth in preference to all the gew-gaw and glitter which greater means and with doubtful purpose can possibly bestow."

The most pleasing feature connected with the marriage was that it gave occasion to the Duchess to write to Sir Walter Scott towards the end of June. This letter, which we give in full, is marked by good taste and geniunc feeling:

"MY DEAR SIR WALTER SCOTT,—Your most welcome letter has wandered many a weary mile

after me. Thanks, many thanks, for all your kind congratulations. I am a Duchess at last, that is certain, but whether I am the better for it remains to be proved. The Duke is very amiable, gentle, and well disposed, and I am sure he has taken pains enough to accomplish what he says has been the first wish of his heart for the last three years. All this is very flattering to an old lady, and we lived so long in friendship with each other that I was afraid I should be unhappy if I did not say I *will*—(whisper it, dear Sir Walter). The name of Coutts—and a right good one it is—is, and ever will be, dear to my heart. What a strange, eventful life has mine been, from a poor little player child with just food and clothes to cover me, dependent on a very precarious profession, without talent or a friend in the world, ‘to have seen what I have seen, seeing what I see’! Is it not wonderful? Is it true? Can I believe it?—first the wife of the best, the most perfect being that ever breathed, his love and unbounded confidence in me, his immense fortune so honourably acquired by his own industry, all at my command . . . and now the wife of a Duke. You must write my life; the *History of Tom Thumb*, *Jack the Giant-Killer*, and *Goody Two Shoes* will sink compared with my true history written by the Author of *Waverley*; and that you may do it well I have sent you an inkstand. Pray give it a place on your table in kind remembrance of your affectionate friend, HARRIOT ST. ALBANS.”

It may be that the Duke and Duehess did not want to excite criticism, for they did not go much into society for some months after the marriage. Possibly the Duchess thought that the aristocracy, one of which she was anxious to consider herself, would be very shy of associating themselves with her, and of running the risk of sharing some of the coarse satire of *The Age* and *John Bull*. She must have been shrewd enough to see that, save for the money she spent, the “Fashionables” did not care



O Lord I who could have thought the Old  
Fellow would have come after me  
but he never was of much use when  
alone and he can only terrify me a little  
when this dead fool of yours goes  
you afraid of a ghost

O dear good old gentleman  
my bravely conducted not  
my will

*The HONEY MOON and The MAN in the MOON, or a <sup>“</sup>new <sup>”</sup> birth a Holly Bush*

From a contemporary caricature.



for her. They could hardly accept her hospitality without showing some return, and for no other reason did she receive cards of invitation for their routs, balls, and dinner-parties.

The papers, however, continued to toady to her, and in the autumn of 1827 the *Post* was to the fore in announcing that "These Noble Personages set out from London on a tour a month ago . . . and are now on a visit to Colonel Hughes at his splendid seat Kimmel Park near St. Asaph. Their carriages are filled with books which give information of everything worthy of notice and are supplied with every comfort and convenience money can procure." Towards the end of the year they were at Brighton, and the *Post's* special correspondent reported that "The Duke and Duchess of St. Albans are living in conjugal felicity in a very unostentatious domestic manner."

"Conjugal felicity" was hardly the ideal existence pictured by the newly-made Duchess. Unless we sorely misjudge her she must have been restive without the glamour of the fashionable world, and the adulation to which she had become accustomed as Mrs. Coutts. She returned to London in the spring of 1828 and during the season plunged into a succession of revelries which eclipsed all her efforts of previous years. It really looked as if she wanted to show her aristocratic friends how a Duchess should behave.

*The Morning Post* was hard put to it to keep pace with her activities, and the brains of its representative must have been racked to find language sufficiently flowery and eulogistic to enable him to do justice to the splendours she lavished upon the *haut ton*. We concentrate his glowing description of her first dinner-party into the bare mention that there were present two dukes, two marquises, three earls, two countesses, three viscounts, three lords, three baronets, and seven ladies of title. But it is hard to resist quoting his account of the "grand Dinner and Supper" at her residence in Piccadilly two

days later, when the Duchess entertained “a very numerous company of the highest distinction.” Here we have Jeames at his best.

“On this occasion the Saloons of that elegant Mansion were brilliantly illumined, and the decorations, which were of the most costly and splendid description, vied only with the magnificence displayed in the Antechambers, which presented a collection of the most rare and odoriferous exotics. The tables were supplied with the choicest delicacies of the season, the arrangement of which confers the highest credit on the celebrated Gombot, cook to her Grace, to whom the sole decoration of the Dinner, etc., was confided. The extensive assortment of rare and choice fruit, together with the great variety of refreshments prepared for the Dessert on this occasion by Mr. Gunter, surpassed anything of the description ever before witnessed. In fact, Lucullus himself, when in the zenith of his glory, and with all the luxuries of ancient Rome, could not surpass the splendid entertainment given by her Grace on this tasteful and sumptuous occasion.”

This eloquent tribute to the Duchess—the Duke, it will be noticed, was ignored—in a way reflects the prominent feature of the times, the worship of the stomach. To read of the dinners in the City and the West End is to picture one continual orgy of guzzling and guttling. Every wealthy man gave dinners and did not care what he spent on them so that they were talked about by the *bon viveurs* whom he entertained. Fauntleroy, the forger banker, was known and sought after in society solely on account of his banquets, which had the reputation of embodying all that was rare and costly. The story is told—whether true or not does not matter, its irony is its justification—that while he was in the condemned cell he was visited by a party of friends who had often dined at his house and had partaken of some very choice curaçoa the banker put on the table on special occasions. He had been frequently asked of whom

he bought this exquisite liqueur, but never would disclose the secret. The party in the condemned cell bade him farewell and were about to retire when one of them stepped back and in a voice broken by emotion said : “ Fauntleroy, you stand on the threshold of the tomb and eternity awaits you. We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can take nothing out. At so supreme a moment have you any objection to say how and of whom you procured that *curaçoa* ? ”

The newspapers revelled in enumerating the dishes which figured at great banquets and one can almost fancy the scribes licking their lips as they wrote. Here is the *menu* of a dinner given to Prince William of Gloucester (“ Silly Billy ”) at Canterbury in 1828 : “ Salmon trout, soles, fricando of veal, rais’d giblet pie, vegetable pudding, chickens, ham, muffin pudding, curry of rabbits, preservè of olives, soup, haunch of venison, open tart, rais’d jelly, three sweetbreads larded, macearoni, buttered lobster, peas, potatoes, baskets of pastry, custards, goose.” One wonders if the dishes were consumed in the order given, and if so, how many of the diners were equal to the goose as a finale ? No wonder in those days quack doctors flourished and—as the advertisements show—the “ *Fashionables* ” dosed and bolused themselves with infallible remedies.

Occasionally some feast of more than ordinary enormity called forth remark, as, for instance, a dinner at Norwood for eighteen members of the “ *Select Vestry* ” of St. Paul, Covent Garden, on the occasion of visiting a few pauper children belonging to the parish. The eighteen drank ten bottles of Bucellas, two of sherry, four bottles of champagne punch, twelve bottles of port, five bottles of Sauterne. The coach hire and turnpikes amounted to £8 11s. 6d., and the total expenses to £34 12s. 6d. Memoirs, biographies, and the anecdote books of the day abound in stories, the incidents in which relate to eating and drinking.

Crockford's gaming house in St. James's Street, which was opened in 1825, was celebrated for its sumptuous suppers. Crockford, who began life as a small fishmonger without a penny in the world, in the neighbourhood of Temple Bar, could in 1828 afford to give the celebrated Ude a salary of a thousand guineas a year with an under *chef* at half the sum. The cellars seldom contained less than 300,000 bottles of wine, besides hogsheads, and all this luxury was supplied to the members and their friends free of charge! But there was method in this seeming madness. The luxury was intended to catch the "flats." It was a far cry from the splendour of Crockford's suppers to the disgusting gorging wagers popular with the lower orders; but in principle there was not much difference.

The "Fashionables" of the twenties and thirties appear to have lived for the sake of feasting and entertaining, and of trying to outdo each other. There were three sections: those who believed in eating and drinking, those who favoured cards—Lady So-and-So's "*Ecarté Party*" was a heading frequently seen in the newspapers—and the worshippers of quadrilles and waltzes. No other dances were admissible.

By the year 1828, the waltz had taken firm root in England, but not until after a prolonged struggle between the ardent devotees of the new dance and Mrs. Grundy, on whose side it was odd to find Lord Byron in his condemnatory poem, of which he was afterwards somewhat ashamed. Raikes gives an entertaining history of the introduction of the waltz and what it had to contend against. Up to 1813 English country dances and Scotch reels were the only dances, even in the first circles. With the cessation of the French War continental tastes were introduced, the German waltz, which had been preceded by the quadrille, was imported, and fashionable London went crazy over it.

"The mornings which had been dedicated to

lounging in the Park," Raikes tells us, "were now absorbed at home in practising the figures of a French quadrille or whirling a chair round the room to learn the step and measure of a German waltz. . . . What scenes have we witnessed in those days at Almack's, etc. ! What fear and trembling in the *debutantes* at the commencement of a waltz, what giddiness and confusion at the end ! . . . The anti-waltzing party took the alarm, cried it down, mothers forbade it, and every ballroom became a scene of feud and contention . . . every night the waltz was called, and new-votaries, though slowly, were added. . . . Still the opposition party did not relax in their efforts, sarcastic remarks flew about, and pasquinades were written to deter young ladies from such a re-creation." Raikes gives the following effusion as "much cited at the time" :

#### ON WALTZING

"With timid step and tranquil downcast glance  
 Behold the well paired couple now advance :  
 One hand holds hers, the other grasps her hip,  
 But licensed to no neighbouring part to slip,  
 For so the law's laid down by Baron Tripp.

"In such pure postures our first parents moved,  
 While hand in hand thro' Eden's bower they roved  
 Ere Beelzebub with meaning foul and false  
 Turned their poor heads, and taught them how to waltz."

Moore in his *Life of Byron* asserts that this was one of several verses written on the subject by Sheridan. Baron Tripp was a Dutchman of fascinating manners, but of very doubtful origin. He was little better than an adventurer, but he made himself very popular in London drawing-rooms and became one of the leaders of the waltzing adherents. When Baron Flahault came over from Paris to captivate Miss Mereer Elphinstone, the great friend of Princess Charlotte, he and other dancing men "drove the prudes into their entrenchments, and when the

Emperor Alexander was seen waltzing round the room at Almack's with his tight uniform and numerous decorations they surrendered at discretion."

The Duke of Devonshire had always been one of the high priests of Terpsichore. In 1813, when he was in the heyday of his passion for the Princess Charlotte, he was an accomplished dancer, and the minuet which he and the Princess footed together at the fête given by the Regent at Carlton House to celebrate the victory of Vittoria formed the subject of a cartoon which we reproduce on page 272. He was one of the staunch supporters of the waltz, and indeed of any new dance. When polonaises and mazurkas threatened to supersede the *galopade* which was all the rage in 1829, the Duke kept a pianist in his house so that he might practise when he was in the mood.

Of the *galopade*, *The Court Journal* of November 2, 1829, gives a very lively account: "There is not a ball from John o' Groats to the Land's End but the favourite new dance *la galoppade* was introduced several times during the evening. . . . The first time we ever saw it in this country was at Devonshire House some two or three years ago, and then, as might be expected, it proved a perfect failure, and notwithstanding that the 'well dressed youths and lovely nymphs' galloped about at the top of their speed to please the noble Duke or themselves, the thing was pronounced *manqué* and banished accordingly to the country, the very Botany Bay for offenders against the laws of fashion. There (notwithstanding our love of novelties and foreign foolery) it might have remained to this day unhonoured and unknown in our London hemisphere had it not been for the Almack's Committee.

"It had long been a complaint among these goddesses of the idolatry of aspirants for fashionable honours that there was 'a plentiful lack' of dancing men. . . . Some attributed this to the Clubs, others to late dinners and indigestion, others to soft hats

and gold-headed canes. Lady Sefton proposed the appointment of daughterless dowagers who should do duty as guardians of the night and make the young people keep moving. Lady Cowper suggested shortening the petticoats; Madame Lieven waiving introductions; Lady Euston and Lady Willoughby had panaceas of their own; but Lady Jersey's was the *coup de maîtresse*—‘Let us bring in the *galopade*, patronise it, make it the fashion, and *c'en est fait*.’ . . . And Lady Jersey was right—the thing took; it flew like wildfire; they were all infected with it; they practised in the morning, they performed at night. Fashion laid aside her lounge. . . . She put Sir Roger de Coverley and Lady Mary Ramsay to pure shame; she shortened the petticoat and discarded flounces—even the Boa was thrown away for the nonce, and in this state she galloped night by night till Lady Jersey's words were fulfilled to the letter.”

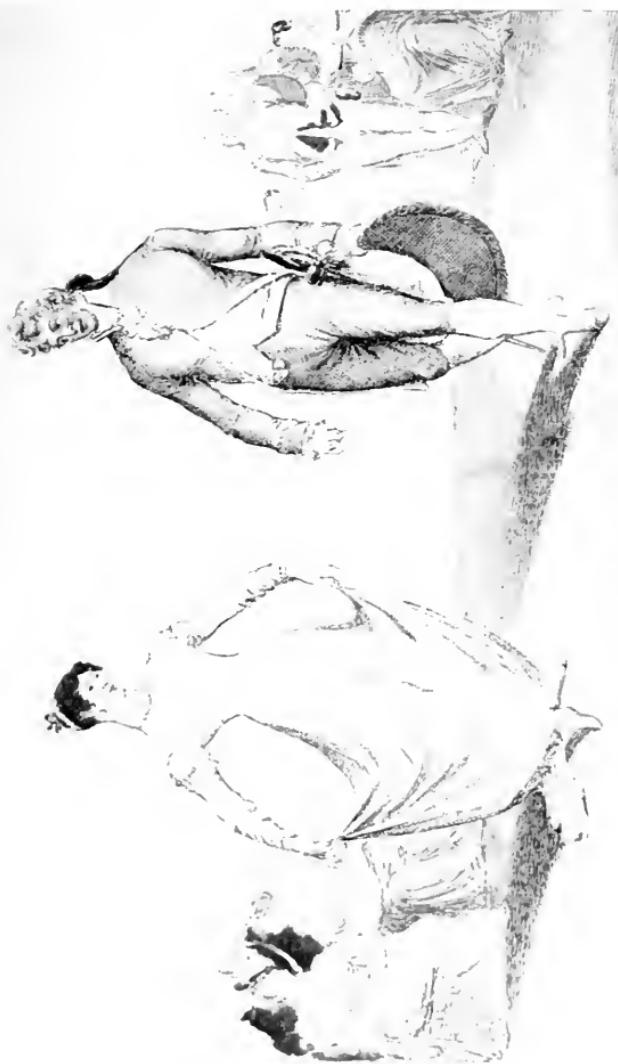
Incidentally a sidelight is thrown on the ways in which dress is altered and determined by necessity. The mention of the “Boa” brings to mind one of the illuminating cartoons, half reality, half caricature, illustrating Gronow's *Reminiscences*. In one of the plates portraying the *élite* of Parisian society at this date three of the ladies in full evening dress are wearing boas.

One can hardly imagine the Duke of Devonshire, stately and impassive like all of his race, and at the age of thirty-nine romping through a mad *galopade*. The slow German waltz of the day did not demand the energy which Raikes and Byron would have us believe was the case, and the Duke probably was at home in its languorous circlings. He had been in Russia, where, as the representative of George IV, he had given private entertainments, and he came back with “ideas” about waltzing which he put in practice at a *hôtel* at Devonshire House in the summer of 1828—Devonshire House with “its lime trees in full bloom,” its “matchless mirrors,” and illumined

only by wax tapers, “for the Duke would allow no other artificial light,” according to the *Post*. Its representative, hardened as he was to the splendour of the “Fashionables,” was particularly struck by “the arrangements for dancing waltzes.”

“To the Great Fête at Moscow,” the *Post* points out, “was the Duke indebted for the idea. In that mazy dance the eye was affected by the glare of light, and to obviate this the Emperor Nicholas himself suggested a remedy. His Grace of Devon has improved upon it: in the saloon the visitors were surprised to see a novelty of a peculiar description—namely, an immense circle representing a garland of flowers suspended in the air, as if by an invisible hand, for no eye could immediately trace the magic of the performance. This ring occupied at an elevation of seven feet nearly the whole space of that vast apartment, and it was covered with artificial flowers and leaves—the whole so exquisitely formed that the touch alone could define their real composition. Among these leaves wax tapers innumerable were placed—and thus the room was lighted up.” In its agitation the *Post* remarked erroneously that “The doors and archways were illuminated by variegated lamps,” and the next day explained that it ought to have added “The exterior was so lighted up. The fact is that no oil is ever introduced into the interior of that mansion.”

The Duchess of St. Albans was among the guests at the fête, and doubtless regarded its novel magnificence with equanimity, conscious that whatever His Grace of Devon could do to astonish the waltzers she could hold her own in a more material direction with the help of the renowned Gombot, to say nothing of the one and only Gunter. At the Drawing-room of this year she was resplendent in “an elegant blond lace dress over a rich white satin slip, the flounces looped up with diamonds, also a superb diamond stomacher; train of rich white satin trimmed with broad blonde lace looped up with



THE DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE DANCING WITH PRINCESS CHARLOTTE OF WALES.



diamonds to correspond with dress. Head dress a profusion of diamonds and feathers."

The "*Post* observed among the equipages at Court on the day of the Levée that of his Grace of St. Albans. It was a singularly light and elegant chariot, painted the Brunswick green, lined with the richest tabbaret watered silk—the colour a bright yellow with patent full-trimmed broad tissue lace, the lamps circular: they and the other ornaments were fully mounted in silver, the Heraldry superbly emblazoned. The arms were quarterly—first and fourth the arms of England and France, second Scotland, and third Ireland. Over all a sinister baton"—(a decorous reminder that his Grace's ancestress was Mistress Nell Gwynn, and ancestor the Gay Monarch. "Do not let poor Nelly starve" was his dying request, and his Majesty's words were not unheeded so far as Nelly's descendants were concerned)—"gules, charged with three roses argent, seeded and barded proper. In the centre of the whole the Duchess of St. Albans' arms in an escutcheon; hammer cloth of yellow superfine cloth richly trimmed with arms and supporters richly embossed in solid silver." One can only hope that the coachman in front and the footmen behind were selected and attired to match.

Naturally *The Age* found congenial material in all this for its peculiar humour. In its description of this gorgeous equipage we are told among other extravagances that: "The crests are of solid gold and stand as large as life on several parts of the harness—hers being a falcon and his a horned owl, *avis sapientia*. By an ingenious wheelwork contrivance in the bodies of these birds they are made to flap their wings as the procession advances, emblematic of the soaring ambition of the parties. The coaches will be drawn by twelve horses each of the most beautiful symmetry and magnificent action. Twelve postillions and four outriders in their state dresses will add to the magnificence of the spectacle

—their caps are to be in the shape of falcons' hoods . . . each servant will carry in his hand a falcon or owl similar to the crests on the horses, all flapping flip-flap together. Should the day be fine her Grace will recline on an ottoman, windows of her carriage open that the public may not be disappointed," and so on.

The effect of this skit, if it had any effect at all, was to increase her Grace's hospitalities. Nine days after it appeared she "gave a splendid entertainment to the Dukes of Cumberland and Sussex. It is unnecessary to say that nothing could exceed the costly description of the magnificent table, ornaments, and of the dinner." The Duchess seemed to court the society of the Royal Dukes, and it is only fair to their Royal Highnesses to say that they responded to her invitations with alacrity. Within three days the indefatigable lady was dining the Dukes of Cumberland and Gloucester with an extra lion thrown in by way of the Duke of Wellington; the next day there was "a splendid entertainment on the occasion of the christening of the daughter of Mr. and Lady Constance Capel, to whom the Duchess stood sponsor," concluded by the company "sitting down to a *dejeune* on a scale equalling in magnificence anything ever given in that noble mansion."

Here and there, in poring over the yellow newspapers of the day, one comes across something which brings these faded and forgotten festivities near to our own times. Elsewhere the first appearance of Miss Goward, afterwards Mrs. Keeley, is noted; to this item of stage history may be added the mention of a "Master Grossmith" who recited, and on March 29, 1828, at the Festival of the Drury Lane Benevolent Fund, to which the Duchess gave £50 and at which her health was proposed, the Duke returning thanks, we read that "Miss Covency (an interesting and very young lady, a daughter of the comedian of that name) gave 'I'd be a Butterfly,' very prettily sung." The Misses Jane and Harriet

Coveney were "stars" at the Eagle in the City Road in the forties and fifties, the first as the tearful heroine of melodrama, and the second supplying the comedy. Miss Harriet Coveney, very popular in her day, died at an advanced age hardly more than ten years ago.

## CHAPTER XXI

The Duke and Duchess celebrate the first anniversary of their wedding day at Holly Lodge—An absurd proceeding—*The Age* ridicules the function in verse—The Duchess, affronted at the ridicule poured upon her, retires to Paris—Her journey burlesqued by *The Age*—The “Epistle to the Duchess of St. Albans,” a defence of her in verse—The Duke and Duchess return to England and tour in Lincolnshire—She is “mobbed” at Louth—The Duke starts to represent his official position as “Hereditary Falconer.”

HER GRACE was evidently on purpose bent not to let her light shine under a bushel. Lest society should forget the memorable day in June of the preceding year when she and the Duke were made one, she and her husband gave “A Grand Fête Champêtre” at Holly Lodge, “to celebrate the anniversary of their Graces’ marriage.” The Duchess had captured a couple of Royal Dukes besides the inevitable Prince Leopold; the company began to assemble at two o’clock, and at four a banquet, oddly called a “breakfast”—which was “laid in eight rooms”—was announced. The Duke of Sussex “in a most flattering and condescending manner” proposed the health of the Duke and Duchess of St. Albans, and the Duke in reply remarked that “he would if he could have revived an old custom of claiming a flitch of bacon at Dunmow, but as he could not do that he begged the Duchess as a mark of his affection and regard to accept a silver fruit-basket (made by Rundell and Bridge and most splendid and valuable), on which was engraved a flitch with the following lines, which his Grace repeated remarkably well to the great amusement of the Royal and distinguished party :

“ In love connubial formed to live and last  
This gift records a blissful twelvemonth past;  
We claim then, boldly claim, thy flitch, Dunmow,  
First, of the blest, who keep this marriage vow.”

The allusion to the “*fliteh*” was very unfortunate, for it served the malicious designs of the rhymesters in *The Age* for a long time afterwards. There was, however, no suspicion of this at the moment—neither the Duchess nor the Duke was particularly adroit in avoiding marks for the foemen—and the Duchess, not to be outdone in conjugal generosity, “begged” the Duke’s acceptance of a six-oared cutter called *The Falcon*, in allusion to his Grace’s office as Grand Falconer of England. Immediately after, the boatmen, dressed in yellow silk and green, the livery of the Duke, with their oars, and the steersman with his flag made their appearance in the Conservatory adjoining, in which the “Canadian Boat Glee” with many other songs were then admirably sung by Mr. Braham, Miss Stephens, Mr. and Mrs. Knyvett, Miss Grant, Miss Goward, etc.

The mention of Miss Goward brings to mind one of the theatrical favourites of mid-Victorian days, for Miss Goward was then Mrs. Keeley, and with her husband, “little” Keeley, added to the gaiety of London for many years. As for the silver fruit-basket and the six-oared cutter, we presume they are treasured up somewhere. It is hardly to be imagined they were stored away with other silver in the vaults of Coutts’s bank, forgotten, and by accident brought to light in the early months of this year (1914), and sold at Christy and Manson’s for so much an ounce.

The *fête champêtre*—which included Russian, Spanish, and German ballets, archery, the Tyrolean troupe, and quadrilles and waltzes—brought down a flood of ridicule upon the devoted couple. This was to be expected, and had the Duchess the slightest sense of humour she would not have conceived so ridiculous a display of affectation. *The Age* pelted her with its coarse satire in the form of verses entitled “*The Bacon Flitch; or The Loves of Queen Dollalolla and Lord Noodle.*” How close the satirist kept to the facts can be seen from the following extract :

“ Princes of royal blood there came,  
 To view the happy pair ;  
 Nobles of ev’ry rank and name,  
 And lots of virtuous fair.

“ The Duke of Suck-eggs rose and said,  
 In manner condescending,  
 ‘ Now that we’ve had our daily bread,  
 I pray your ears be lending.

“ ‘ We meet to celebrate the loves  
 Of Noodle and of Dolla,  
 Here in old Tommy’s Holly Groves  
 Their luscious wine to swallow.

“ ‘ Then drink and to the loving pair  
 Let bumpers off be taken ;  
 Drink also to th’ expected heir  
 The young Sir Roger Bacon.’

“ Lord Noodle rose o’ercome by fear  
 And thank’d his dearest friends ;  
 Said that for Dolla’s love so dear  
 He ne’er could make amends.

“ He had intended to renew  
 A very ancient custom,  
 And claim the fitch, but ’wouldn’t do—  
 The parties wouldn’t trust him.

“ ’Twas known to all that Dolla’s self  
 Was virtue’s sacred casket,  
 Therefore from out her stores of pelf  
 He’d bought her a fruit basket.

“ Then Dolla, pregnant with delight,  
 Replied she ne’er had felt  
 In speaking such a nervous fright  
 Since in these groves she dwelt.

“ Grateful on Noodle still she’d doat,  
 Spite of all envious roars ;  
 ’Twas Love’s high tide and so a boat  
 She’d bought with ‘ six fine oars.’

“ Next in walk boatmen dressed in green,  
 A most appropriate colour,  
 And mix’d therewith was peeping seen  
 A little bit of ‘ yellow.’

“ The Boat Glee follow’d by the don  
 Of vocal fame and power ;  
 Noodle then being call’d upon  
 Sung ‘ Pluck the Fairest Flower.’

“ Description can but ill portray  
The splendour of the scene,  
On this returning bridal day  
Of Dolla’s graceful Queen.”

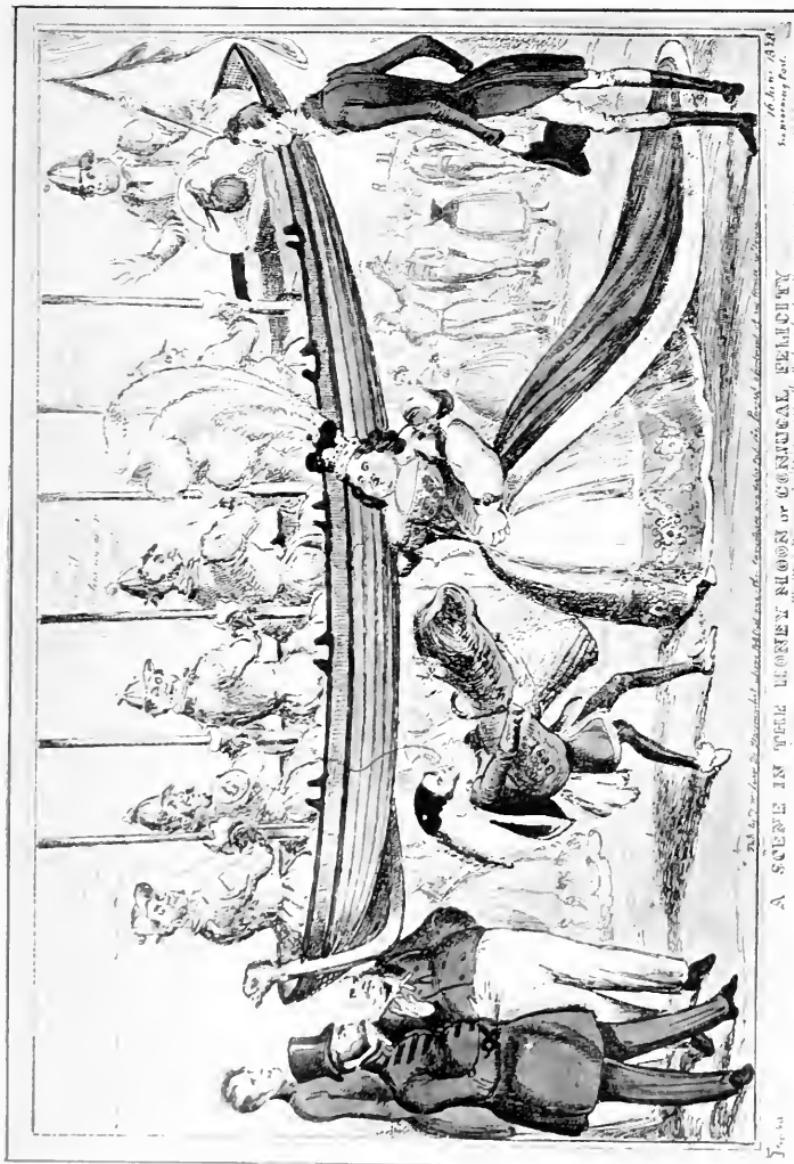
There were more verses not too refined, but apart from these the specimens we have quoted were enough to make the Duchess’s nobly born lady friends shrug their shoulders and draw their skirts around them, and this attitude was much worse to endure than the gibes and mocking of the rhymester. *The Age* is, of course, not reliable on questions of fact, but we are inclined to think it had authority when it wrote on July 6: “ Considerable offence, it seems, has been given to a certain Duchess from the pointed manner in which the Marchioness of Londonderry behaved by not inviting her Grace on the evening of her magnificent fancy ball. The Duchess, vexed to the soul at having been excluded from an entertainment at which all the *haut ton* were present, has been venting her spleen by talking a great deal about ‘ ingratitude ’ and the ‘ pecuniary obligation ’ which the Noble — was under to her late dear old and affectionate husband, Tommy Coutts, and ungenerously reaping up many stale occurrences of former-day friendships as good and substantial reasons why she considers she is ungratefully as well as pointedly dealt with by not being placed on the list of Noble visitors for that evening. . . . By the way, we have done some service to the State by the comments we have made upon these persons. The Duchess has sent round to all her employees announcing her intention of discontinuing her fêtes and parties. The scandalous newspapers, she says, have used her so abominably that she ‘ curses her country and retires to the Continent.’ ”

It was true. At last the repeated shafts of satire had struck home, and what she had endured as Mrs. Coutts was intolerable as the Duchess of St. Albans. It is quite possible that she may have thought in her vanity that her high rank would protect her, whereas

it made her more vulnerable. Now that she was one of the “upper classes,” to sneer at her was to sneer at all the coroneted dames who had countenanced her. She was no fool when not blinded by the glamour of wealth and flattery, and she probably felt that the noble ladies who had complacently accepted her friendship would be the first to turn their backs upon her if she did anything to bring their order into contempt. It must be admitted that this is what she had done, harmless as was the fooling of the *fête champêtre*. It is permissible for a highly-born lady to run away with some other woman’s husband, and to indulge in daring escapades, but she must not commit the unpardonable sin of being ridiculous. The poor Duchess was of low birth, she was not associated with any intrigue, but she had brought ridicule upon herself, and she was not to be forgiven. The high born, especially its feminine representatives, are adepts in the art of polite snubbing, and it is pretty clear that the Duchess was made to understand that she was being slighted. Her creed was the worship of wealth, and it was only natural she should feel that the aristocrats were ungrateful for the gold she had showered upon them.

Retirement—for a time at least—was the only thing to be done, and in confirmation of the statement in *The Age* we find the following in *The Globe* of August 2: “The Duke and Duchess of St. Albans are gone to reside (it is said, but we hope untruly) permanently in France, her Grace being, it is rumoured, much dissatisfied with the ingratitude of the English. We do not know what is meant by this statement, but as the departure of her Grace is said to have been attended by the discharge of nearly forty servants we cannot but regret that anything should have occurred to disgust her Grace and render destitute so many individuals, to say nothing of the injury inflicted upon her tradesmen by the expenditure of her fortune in a foreign country.”

The *Post*, in reproducing *The Globe’s* announcement,



"The Duke of St. Albans is in the centre of the picture; the Duke of Sussex and Cumberland and Prince Leopold to the left.  
From a contemporary caricature.  
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added: "We hope and trust this statement will prove unfounded, though it must be admitted that their Graces have received great provocation. The Duchess was in the habit of performing almost daily acts of the most laudable charity, and besides what would be lost to humanity various tradespeople, among whom she expended great sums of money, would suffer materially by her permanent absence." Whatever might be the Duchess's personal inclinations, public opinion, as expressed above, had no doubt whatever that it was her duty to spend her money, and as much of it as possible, in her own country.

The exodus of the Duchess was celebrated by her tormentor in a lengthy effusion headed "The Grand Tour of the Duchess," supposed to be written by Lord F. Beauclerk, the Duke's reverend uncle. The "hits" at the Duchess, which are vulgar without being funny, may be left undisturbed, but other parts are not without information. The "coachman of her Grace who was seen stationed on his box outside the corner house of Stratton Street, Piccadilly" is described as having an eye "fixed and steady. . . . It did not roll to the right like Lord William Lennox's, nor move upward and downward spirally like that of the Earl of Blessington." The carriage "entered a long and rather narrow street which is known by the name of the Strand"; in Fleet Street, it passed the Cock, "the best stout tavern in London," and arrived in front of St. Dunstan's Church at twelve o'clock, when "the curious phenomenon of St. Dunstan's automata was about to be exhibited. The mind of the Duke, ever anxious to acquire useful knowledge, suggested to him that he should stop until the clock struck. With an anxious eye he watched the interesting figures as they, with alternate hammers, made the bell to ring sonorously."

Then came the obelisk in Ludgate Circus, not long before erected to Alderman Waithman, Bride-well in Bridge Street, Forde's Rotunda in the Black-friars Road ("the Duchess was an old friend of

Forde's," remarks the chronicler of the tour), in 1829 used as an exhibition of penny shows, Rowland Hill's Chapel (though an old man of eighty-five, Hill was still preaching in 1828), the Surrey Theatre, where it was represented "Elliston with his whole troupe was drawn up in front of the turnpike to congratulate the great ornament of the histrionic profession. Elliston was just as sober as he was when he last acted Falstaff at Drury," by which it was insinuated that he was as drunk as he could be. There was a double meaning in this dragging in of Elliston, apart from the fact that he was the Duke in *The Honeymoon*, in which, as Volante, Harriot Mellon made her greatest success. *The Age* had more than once asserted that in those days she was very nearly becoming Elliston's wife.

Her Grace was not allowed to be in France long without being paragraphed. Stories of her vast wealth had preceded her, and she was received with an enthusiasm which must have acted as balm to her wounded spirit. *Le Mentor*, a French newspaper, published a biography of her, and in speaking of the début of Miss Mellon as Lydia Languish the writer says: "Elle débûta à Londres en 1798 dans le rôle de Lydia des Langueurs," which, remarks an English paper, "if it be translatable at all might be rendered Lydia of the Languours!" Another reference to her sojourn in France is contained in *The Brighton Gazette*, which complains that the Parisians regarded the Duchess "as a fit subject for the exercise of their rapacity. Her Grace gave a dinner the other day to fifteen persons, for which she was charged at the rate of 162 francs each, besides 2,000 francs for the use of the plateau, a sum in all probability exceeding its worth."

But the Duchess was not altogether without a defender. In 1828—at what period of the year we are unable to say, but we presume it was in the early autumn—was published an *Epistle to Harriot, Duchess of St. Albans, or The First Lash of Nemesis. Printed*

for James Ilberry, British and Foreign Library, Titchfield Street, Cavendish Square." The *Epistle* was in verse and was a well-merited castigation of the Duchess's lampoonists and libellers. It was probably prompted by the scurrility of *The Age*, which was never so coarse and impudent as after the unlucky celebration of the first anniversary of the wedding day. Who was responsible for the *Epistle*, and whether the writer or any one else paid for the expenses of printing and publishing, are questions we are unable to answer. It is certain, however, that the author was a man of considerable ability, and knew how to wield the pen of satire quite in the style of Churchill. The *Epistle* begins thus :

" While 'tis the fashion to belie thy fame,  
 Distorting ev'n thy wishes into shame,  
 And daily tales pervade the public ear,  
 Forg'd by thy foes to propagate a sneer ;  
 While venal pens and hireling press combine  
 In prose and verse to spread the libellous line,  
 And recreant pencils prostitute their art,  
 To tip with keener points detraction's dart—  
 Amaz'd perchance thou startest to peruse  
 Lines penn'd to thee uncoupled with abuse ;  
 And doubt'st the honest purport of a strain  
 Unstain'd with malice, uninspir'd by gain."

The satirist then proceeds to apply the lash to some purpose.

" Clothe St-(ock)-dale in thy livery and the rogue  
 Will crouch before thee like a beggar's dog ;  
 . . . .  
 A scullion make the famished wretch that lie  
 About the cook or near the pantry be :  
 . . . .  
 Pay but his dinners and his future days  
 Will be a consecration to thy praise.

" Set Sh-(el)-drake to direct and to abuse  
 . . . .  
 Let his tongue loose upon the servants' hall  
 To keep them in good order, one and all  
 . . . .

Thus sav'd by thee from gallows and disgrace  
 He'll buy a nose for that all hideous face,  
 Retract his lies too low to carry taint,  
 And sanctify his victim as a saint."

Stockdale was a publisher of a certain class of gutter literature of which the *Memoirs of Harriet Wilson* and *The Secret Memoirs of Harriot Pumpkin* may be taken as examples, and Sheldrake was a hack writer of the Grub Street order. The author reserves his keenest shafts for Richard Molloy Westmacott, the editor of *The Age*, who, whether he was a blackmailer or not, had not the least scruple in prostituting his talents to base uses. During this very year 1828, Westmacott was closely associated with a Captain Garth, the reputed son of General Garth, one of George the Third's equerries, who was plotting a mysterious scheme in connection with certain papers containing secret matters affecting the members of the Royal Family, which he had cunningly obtained, and which he would only surrender on the payment of a large sum of money.<sup>1</sup> Of *The Age* and its editor the satirist writes :

"Beneath thy butler place the bawdy 'Age'  
 And o'er drained bottles let him sooth his rage :  
 Long hath he clamour'd for a sum to drink  
 But hope till now hath only run to ink.  
 Pay for his drams—slake but that thirsty throat  
 And all his rancour will be straight forgot.

Oh W-(estmae)-ott at *all* for half a crown,  
 Hir'd fag of journals to revile the town ;  
 Was't thine without a character or shirt  
 Born in a coal hole to bespatter dirt ?  
 E'en so thine honest father serv'd the throng,  
 Besmutting people as he sneak'd along ;  
 A chimney sweep they say, whose craft though mean  
 Still sav'd from flames and kept our firesides clean ;

Better sweep chimnies, humble though the fruit,  
 Than starve by smutting characters with soot :  
 SAINT ALBANS will not pay—so out, and creep  
 Back to thy first young cry of—sweep ho ! sweep."

<sup>1</sup> For the full story of this mysterious affair, see *The Beloved Princess* (Stanley Paul & Co.).

The *Epistle* seems to have pierced *The Age*'s thick hide, for Westmacott remained silent under his flogging. A year or two later he received personal chastisement at the hands of Charles Kemble for an abusive attack in *The Age* on the actor's daughter Fanny.

If the Duchess had the intention of residing in France she soon altered her mind, for in September she was back in England on a tour through the eastern counties. This was at the end of September, and a Lincoln paper had the following : "It seems to be the intention of the Duke and Duchess of St. Albans to resume the spirit of the ancient and manly sports of our forefathers at their seat at Redbourne near this city (Lincoln). Lord Frederick Beauclerk and Lord Emilius Beauclerk, the uncles of the Duke, passed through this city on their route to Redbourne Hall, where it is understood a series of amusements for the autumn will be kept up, relieving and supplying the usual sports of the chace, shooting, coursing, etc. Among these, falconry, fishing, etc., will be rendered prominent entertainments."

The Duke, it will be remembered, was the Hereditary Grand Falconer of England, and he seems to have thought that he ought to do something to justify the holding of this high office, for which a grateful country paid him yearly £1,372—so far as we know, very nearly this sum is paid to-day to the present Grand Falconer<sup>1</sup>—and he inaugurated his new career of activity by giving "a Falcons Hunt on the Race Course of this city in front of the Grand Stand" (*Lincoln Herald*, October 27).

But though the Duke was a Lincolnshire magnate, owning as he did 5,255 acres in the county (the possession coming to the Beauclerks through a marriage of the eighth Duke with a rich heiress), it was the Duchess the Lincolnshire people wanted to see, and

<sup>1</sup> "At the present time (1883) I find that his Grace condescends to draw from the revenue the sum of £1,200 annually as Grand Falconer." *Our Old Nobility* (Howard Evans).

not the Duke or his falcons. The Duke and Duchess were invited to the inauguration dinner of the Mayor of Lincoln, and his worship, with a sense of the fitness of things, proposed the Duchess's health, "which, being enthusiastically drunk, the Duke said: 'I am proud of my wife and I love her—the Duchess and myself despise the miscreants who assail her'"—a little speech which the *Herald* says was received with applause.

The people of Lincoln restrained their curiosity within decent bounds, but it was very different when the Duke and Duchess reached Louth. *The Stamford News* gives a spirited account of the embarrassments of the party. "On the arrival of the retinue at Louth," it says, "the inhabitants to the amount of some thousands thronged the streets in such a manner that the carriages could only proceed at a foot pace to the inn. This assemblage did not consist of the mob alone, but chiefly of the inhabitants misnamed 'gentry,' and the assemblage was not for the purpose of welcoming his Grace, but for indulging in the vulgar stare to perfection. On the arrival of the party at the King's Head inn it became necessary to employ constables to keep the mob out of the house, and though this plan succeeded in preventing the ingress of the ragamuffinly part of the assemblage still the well-dressed rabble male and female thronged the passage of the house gracelessly eager to peep at her Grace as she passed from one room to another. Such as could not get into the inn thronged the upper windows of a grocer's house opposite in the hope of there gratifying their curiosity. The rabble in the streets lifted each other up to look in at the windows."

This snobbery was bad enough, but it was capped by what followed, laughable as some of it was, during the Duchess's stay at the inn. "A public breakfast to the noble visitors," the report continues, "was proposed by one of the members of the Body Corporate, but it was immediately negatived by the

Warden, who afterwards assigned as his reason for so doing 'that his wife would disapprove of it.' The Vicar left the feast to pay his respects to their Graces and invite them to visit his hermitage, and he was the only one whose visit could be considered of a complimentary nature. The only persons who called besides were beggars for the public charities, to which her Grace contributed liberally. Amongst others who called were the ringers, requiring ten guineas for their steeple music. The Duchess sent them four guineas by Lord Æmilius Beauclerk, whom they mistook for an old valet and on whom they showered a *peal* of abuse, telling him that the Duchess had sent them five guineas and that he had pocketed one!"

The demands of the ringers were, however, outdone by that of the curate, tempered though it was by clerical deportment. "On visiting the hermitage the Duchess was pestered by the Curate with a petition which she declined receiving. On leaving it (*i.e.* the hermitage) the party went to view the church, and here again the Curate forced his petition on the Duchess, which she indignantly threw away without looking at it. The Duchess visited a few shops in Louth, and would have visited more but for the conduct of the Louth *ladies*, who followed her from shop to shop, staring through the windows during the times she was making her purchases. On leaving the town she signified her determination never to enter it again. We commend her spirit."

Opinion differed concerning the Louth episode. *The Globe* took the opportunity to lecture the unlucky Duchess. "Whatever may have been the rudeness of the Louth people," it remarked severely, "and their offence in 'indulging in the vulgar stare to perfection,' we cannot help thinking that the reception her Grace experienced there will teach her a lesson of prudence for which she has not paid too expensively. Her Grace has been reproached for a fondness for public exhibitions, and with an ostenta-

tion in her munificence which her best friends have been unable to defend. She may now learn that privacy will be more congenial to her state, and that she will derive more real pleasure from the unostentatious exercise of her benevolence than from the public exhibitions in which she has recently been so prominent.” After such a rebuke in an important London paper the Duchess must have more than ever regretted that unlucky *fête champêtre*.

When worried the Duchess generally sought the seclusion and mild gaiety of Brighton. Here at all events she was free from censure and she was sure that whatever she did would be acceptable. Accordingly she passed the last month of the year in quietude with the Duke, who, anxious to show his zeal in the public service of “resuming the spirit of the ancient and manly sports of our forefathers,” made a trial of “his celebrated hawks with pigeons instead of partridges on the Race Down, but the former, as if indignant at the change, obstinately refused to act. The usual incentives and decoys were had recourse to, but all ineffectually.” This unaccountable perversity on the part of the hawks was all the more annoying because “the Duke was habited as the Grand Falconer,” whatever the costume may have been, and “the Duchess with the Ladies Beauclerk, was there in her carriage.” It was perhaps a stroke of good luck that “but few spectators appeared on the ground, what was intended not having previously been permitted to transpire.” Evidently the reproof of *The Globe* had not been in vain.

A second attempt was made a few days later, and the favourite quarry of the fastidious falcons having been provided, “a partridge was struck in good style and killed.” This success, unfortunately, seems to have had an over-exhilarating effect on the Duke’s favourite falcon, for it “winged its flight to Rottingdean and was there shot by a wandering fowler.” The Duke valued the bird at 100 guineas and his Grace did all he could for the poor thing—



THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON & ST. ALHANS  
A caricature of the Duke of Wellington by George Cruikshank, 1815.

From a contemporary caricature.  
The Duke of St. Albans holds the hand of the Duchess. Behind him is the Duke of Wellington is to the right of the King.



he “ gave orders that he may be stuffed.” But the falcon did not die in vain, for the grief of his Grace was made the theme of a song entitled “ The Falconer’s Lament,” set to music by Mr. Bishop—afterwards Sir Henry—and “ sung at a fête given by her Grace.”

## CHAPTER XXII

The signs of the times in 1829—The attitude of the aristocracy towards the Duchess—Her *fête champêtre* of the seas—*The Court Journal's* rhapsody—Holly Lodge described—The cow and the syllabub—Burlesqued by *The Age*—Sir Thomas Lawrence and the Duchess—The new police.

SIGNS were not wanting in 1829 that the reign of boundless prodigality which had marked the period of the Regency and the monarchy of George IV was coming to an end. The First Gentleman in Europe had ceased to exercise his sway over fashion and direct the taste—such as it was—of the times. Continual routs, balls, *déjeuners*, dinner-parties were beginning to pall. The glory of Almack's was waning. The splendour of the Devonshire House functions and the princely extravagance of the Marquis of Hertford were no longer themes for wonder; even the costliness of the Holly Lodge fêtes offered but a languid excitement.

The fine ladies and the gallant gentlemen of the aristocracy were dying of inanition. They had literally nothing to do, and the feebleness of their minds is reflected in the tasteless fashions of the day, in the vapid literature so far as fiction is concerned, and in the society attitude towards music and the drama. The wand of the Wizard of the North had lost its magic, and its wielder, a broken man, was lashing his jaded brain to no purpose. Ladies learned the harp and the guitar, not because they cared for either or ever attained any proficiency, but because both instruments enabled them to display their arms and wrists in graceful curves. For the same reason they took up archery, for years the fashionable outdoor sport, and much favoured because

it provided the attraction of a special and highly effective costume. As for the men, they had no occupation other than gambling, racing, and other sports. Cock-fighting had not gone out and the ring was the only "manly" art worth patronising. The ideal of the young gentleman of the day was "Corinthian Tom." The picturesqueness of the eighteenth century had disappeared with knee-breeches, hoops, and sedan chairs. Only its coarseness remained.

The idle rich could hardly have been ignorant of the terrible condition of the working classes, whether in town or country; the frightful poverty and distress were everywhere too plain. The Parliamentary Commission on child labour in mills and factories sat in 1828, and its proceedings, published verbatim in *The Times* day after day, cannot now be read without a shudder; but there is no evidence that fashionable society at the time was in the least disturbed. The rick-burning, the smashing of machines, the riots all over the country were regarded simply as wanton crimes, and were severely punished. No one thought to inquire into the causes, of which such acts were the inevitable outcome.

In 1829 there was a strike among the Spitalfields silk weavers, and loom-wrecking set in. The savage punishments of the eighteenth century had not been abandoned, and one poor wretch, on June 3, was publicly flogged at Bethnal Green for 100 yards, "weeping bitterly," as the *Post* records. Hanging was still the penalty for forgery and other offences much less serious. Brutality, bigotry, and an affectation of piety in the administration of the law were perhaps not so prominent as in the days of those champions of liberty of thought, William Hone and Richard Carlile; and public spies of the type of the infamous Edwards, who, there is reason to believe, invented much of the evidence against the Thistlewood conspirators, were less numerous; but the lessening of these scandals was not so much due to

an increase of illumination of those in high places as that the great masses of the people, the workers, were struggling—blindly enough, it must be admitted—to burst the bonds of ignorance, oppression, injustice, and poverty which had enslaved them for years and years, while the aristocracy were living luxuriously on their rent-rolls, and their poorer relatives and hangers-on were fattening on sinecures at the public expense. These struggles made their effects felt in the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832, but it was long before any material improvement followed.

In 1829 there seem to have been only two remedies for poverty, starvation, and crime—one provided by the law, and the other by the “benevolent rich.” The first administered hangings, floggings, and imprisonments; the second gave away blankets at Christmas-time. Nor could there have been an excess of the second, or the “benevolence” of the Duchess of St. Albans would not have been so much extolled. Evidently it was something out of the common. Yet, unsuspected by any one, a great power was inaugurated in 1829 destined to break down the barriers between rich and poor in a more effectual way than even the French Revolution was able to accomplish. This great leveller commenced its work when the humble little “Rocket” ran thirty-five miles in an hour, to the astonishment of all and the incredulity of many.

The five years between 1824, when the star of the Duchess burst into brilliancy, to 1829, when it began to wane, represented the last efforts of the “Fashionables” to maintain the round of incessant gaieties initiated during the Regency. “Life would be durable but for its amusements,” sighed Sir George Cornewall Lewis, and the truth of the epigram was felt. The newspapers of 1829 somehow suggest that the old days of reckless pleasure were over. The fashionable intelligence no longer occupied the space and prominence of years gone by. The decay of the

monarch, though nothing of the truth found its way into the public prints, was reflected in the air of exhaustion which seemed to pervade society, but so far as the Duchess of St. Albans was concerned she bravely adhered to the programme she had laid down for herself. She never failed to attend Court in the season, and the Drawing-room function was always followed up by one of her Holly Lodge fêtes.

Yet by 1829 she must have become conscious that, in spite of her lavish outlay and the patronage of royal dukes, she had not succeeded in penetrating the circle of the exclusives. Her name is not often to be found in the lists of the guests at the parties and balls of the grand dames ; she was never admitted to Almack's—the holy of holies. Whether she ever sought to become a member cannot be determined, but it is certain that any such request on her behalf would have been peremptorily rejected. With the haughty patronesses who laid down the laws and rigorously enforced them it was not a question of a majority of votes or of influence or even of rank. The objection of any one lady to an aspirant was fatal. Lady Jersey—not the Lady Frances of that title who made so much mischief between the Prince of Wales and the unhappy Caroline, but Lady Sarah Sophia Fane, the wife of the fifth Earl—never countenanced the Duchess, and Lady Jersey belonged to the very *crème de la crème* of society ladies. The Duchess of Rutland and the Duchess of Leinster also held aloof.

It is significant that, of the royal dukes, his Highness of Clarence was the only one who was never seen at Holly Lodge. Perhaps he wanted to forget his close association with the stage now that poor Mrs. Jordan was dead, and to meet her old associate Harriot Mellon might have been embarrassing, especially as the precarious state of the King's health was bringing the crown nearer to him.

An emotional woman like the Duchess could not fail to have moments of reaction and fits of depre-

sion when all must have seemed vanity, but as a rule—outwardly at least—she maintained her energy and high spirits. However, during the early months of 1829, for reasons which are not quite apparent, unless she was becoming sensitive to the persistent attacks made upon her, she was not much seen in public—so seldom indeed that *The Age* on April 5 observed: “To the numerous enquiries of correspondents after her Grace the Duchess of St. Albans we beg leave to say that the noble lady is not dead, but sleepeth—that is, she now for the first time since she became a Duchess is living quiet, cozy, and retired, as becometh a demi-respectable of her class, and while she continues to do so neither the taunt of *Inquizzitor* or any other motive hunter shall induce us to interfere.”

*The Age* soon had occasion to change its tone. On June 7 it wrote: “We thought the Duchess of St. Albans had given up the practice of publishing her parties, but we find by *The Morning Post* that her Grace has resumed it. But it is rather fortunate that she should publish her company also, for really a more raff set never invaded a tea garden. There is the Duke of Sussex to be sure, but his Royal Highness goes everywhere from Houndsditch to Holland House, where there is anything to eat—and Colonel D’Este follows his papa.”

The Duchess ignored these sneers as she had ignored many others. Indeed, they may have spurred her on to further exertions, for her fête of 1829 was described by *The Court Journal* as “without exception the most attractive and complete thing of the kind that the fashionable season has hitherto produced.” The *Post* has but little to say, although the *déjeune* had very speeial features. Truth to tell, the organ of the “Fashionables” had in 1829 quite lost its exuberance, and its description of society “events” had become tame and spiritless.

*The Court Journal* had come into existence during the year and saw its chance. With the confidence

of youth it dashed into a style of journalese the like of which had not been seen outside the novels of the period. The writer started his (or should it be her?) account of the Duchess's fête with an ecstatic rhapsody on the superiority of a *fête champêtre* (the word *déjeune* apparently was old-fashioned) over every other kind of fashionable function, and while the flow of language was on proceeded to say: "And the reason is simple; a *fête champêtre* such as we are supposing may be made to unite all the better qualities and attractions of every other species of fashionable *reunion*, and in addition to all these an attraction superior to and more universal than them all in its power of intimately and mysteriously mingling them all with that love of external nature which as it is the *first love* of every human heart so is it the only love which no other love—which no hate—nay, which not indifference itself—that universal solvent at once and cement of fashionable society—can even control the movements of, much less extinguish." One's brain fairly reels under this brilliancy and, maybe, the writer was apprehensive of something of this kind, for she—it *must* be a she—suddenly breaks off with "We demand *mille pardons*," and betaking herself seriously to her task somewhat recovers her sanity.

"On passing through a neat and slightly suburban village *once* known (in May Fair, at least) by the name of Kentish Town," we read, "you reach the steep ascent leading to Highgate, about halfway up which on the right you enter by a pair of slight iron gates a carriage-drive bounded on either side by a dense grove. . . . Through this avenue of unbroken and embowering green you wind to the left for a considerable distance up a steep ascent till you reach . . . a slight and half transparent screen of vines and parasitic plants supported by trellis-work. Passing by this screen for about a hundred yards you reach the house—a small and perfectly simple building of white stucco and having one bow window on each

side of the door. . . .” We quote this—shorn of much of its luxuriance—because it represents the only description of Holly Lodge we have met with. The flowery writer spares us an elaborate description of the interior, but cannot refrain from enthusiasm when speaking of the “apartments,” which she tells us are “fitted up with the most perfect purity and simplicity of taste that is consistent with an air of wealth and *recherché* [we were waiting for this indispensable word], and the whole look forth on a scene of natural beauty in all respects corresponding with the small size and simple taste of the building: masses of embowering green,” and so on and so forth for some forty lines which we omit.

We are then informed that “the early part of the day put forth the most unfavourable appearances, but by four o’clock the scene we have sketched above was alive and sparkling in every part with a more choice collection of female beauty in face and form and of female taste and splendour in out-of-door attire than any other similar re-union of the season has presented, and which we doubt if the Horticultural will equal in these respects or even Chiswick itself surpass.” The company were “received by the Duchess in the open air, from whence to the house a footway of green cloth was placed, and immediately on paying their respects to their hostess they dispersed themselves through the grounds to the various points of temporary attraction. There were few, however, who did not pause as they passed up the principal walk to admire four beautiful young hooded hawks that were carried on a frame by the Duke’s falconer.” As for the musical entertainment “nothing could be more agreeable than the effect of Camporesc’s almost pastorally fine style and the wild sweetness of Stockhausen’s voice”; but the admiring writer missed “*one* voice,” the fair owner of which was present during the whole day, “that of Miss Stephens,” who “was merely a visitor of her friend and patroness.”



SARAH SOPHIA FANE, COUNTESS OF JERSEY.

From an engraving by H. T. Ryall, after E. T. Parris.



The concert was certainly of a most varied character. "Madame Vigo and some male artists of her nation" sang a set of Spanish airs; six figurantes of the King's Theatre went through the national dances introduced into the ballet in "Masaniello," and, remarks the scribe with emotion, "we do not know when an exhibition of this kind has touched us so nearly." She is unable to refrain from wandering at considerable length on the moving sight of the figurantes, winding up with: "Certain it is that these dances called forth in not a few bosoms feelings and associations the entertainments of which nothing but the non-exclusiveness of a *fête champêtre* 'in the pleasant month of June' could have tempted us to recognise as other than *mauvais ton*." The writer is almost at bursting point, but she has a few gasps left, and returning to her rhapsodical style she confides to the readers of *The Court Journal* that the *fête champêtre* "possessed . . . a charm which (say what we may and try to believe and feel what we will) finds a secret hold and sympathy in the human heart, from which nothing—not all the mingled exclusiveness and indifference in the world—even the world of fashion—can wholly detach us."

This "fine, confused" piece of writing seems to have overpowered the editor, for it is the first and last specimen of the kind. One episode we have left for special mention, as it shows that the Duchess had original ideas in the way of novelties for the entertainment of her guests. "A pretty little pastoral incident was arranged on the lawn, where two Alderney cows were introduced dressed in flowers *à la Suisse*, and when Madame Stockhausen had sung the *Ranz des Vaches* which their appearance suggested, a syllabub (the word is as old-fashioned as the thing)—but we pause not to explain either) was prepared on the spot, which the Duchess distributed with her own hands to several of the most distinguished visitors, his Highness of Gloucester in particular, who seemed to approve it mightily. A few, however, of her

Grace's youthful guests were put in a most becoming perplexity to know what to make of this (to them) novel refection ; and their alleged reluctance to take it was made the occasion of one or two vastly pretty flirtations which we forbear to particularise."

The same discreet reticence was not observed by *The Age*, which saw an opportunity for one of its characteristic burlesques. "It was proposed," thus its version runs, "as a brilliant conclusion to the fête that the company should partake of a syllabub on the lawn, and for this purpose a favourite white cow properly decorated with flowers and ribands was placed near an immense bowl, into which a girl dressed as a Swiss milkmaid was to milk the cow, while an eminent vocalist, who dressed *en costume* was placed on one side of the bowl to sing the *Ranz des Vaches*, accompanied on the harp by her husband dressed *à l'antique pastorale*. The admiring and expectant company gathered round the milk-white animal, and all promised a happy *coup de théâtre*, but unfortunately, as the precaution of infusing into the mind of the cow a preparatory taste for Swiss melody had been neglected, she no sooner heard the sound of the harp than up went her head and her tail, away went the flowers and the ribands, away ran the vocalist, down fell the harp, and off ran the company." The conclusion of the description may be left untold ; it is in *The Age's* most unpleasant vein.

Possibly the indifference of the Duchess to this banter increased *The Age's* virulence. In its next issue it fell foul of the following, also in *The Court Journal* : "A singular circumstance took place at the Duchess of St. Albans' fête which was not noticed in our accounts. There was present on the occasion a very aged gentleman to whom the Duchess paid particular attention during the early part of the day. In the evening the noble hostess rose from her seat, and having asked one of her attendants for a light, proceeded to make a circuit of the drawing-room. Suddenly her Grace stopped short before this mys-

terious personage whom nobody knew, and exclaimed, 'I've found an honest man.' We understand the gentleman's name to be Dickie, and that he has long been a confidential clerk in the banking house."

About this precious piece of nonsense *The Age* wrote: "When we consider the set who haunt the Duchess we do not wonder that she was tempted to make an exclamation of wonder at seeing an honest man among them. But we doubt the story, for we are assured that neither Dickie nor Coutts Trotter, nor Majoribanks, nor any other clerks of the shop in the Strand are ever allowed to enter their mistress's house (except on business), except once a year when she gives a dance to her steward Toady, Lord Freddy, and the other household attendants. She is just now bursting with indignation because Prince Leopold, after going to her parties whenever he is asked, did not invite her to his own beggarly entertainment. It *does* look shabby, but the Princesses (one of whom brought a Miss Coutts with her) kicked against it."

We have a suspicion that in this statement *The Age* correctly indicated the attitude of the highest Court ladies towards the Duchess. One thing about the extracts from *The Court Journal* is very clear. The editor was well advised in dispensing with the services of its ultra-emotional representative—much to the loss of *The Age*.

Two more quotations from the newly established society organ in connection with the Duchess brings us to the end of 1829. One refers to Sir Thomas Lawrence, who died during the year heavily involved in debt. Of this event the *Journal* remarks, "We have the best authority for the following anecdote: Sir Thomas Lawrence was informed a few days previous to his death that Messrs. Coutts would demand immediate payment of a bond for five thousand pounds. Sir Thomas went in a great state of agitation to the banking house and was shown into the private room, where to his surprise he found the

Duchess of St. Albans. Her Grace, perceiving his agitation, inquired the cause, and having ascertained it, shook him kindly by the hand and said, ‘Lay aside all anxiety on this subject: I will be personally responsible for the amount, which you can repay at your own convenience.’”

The other extract is gossip pure and simple. In November we read: “*On dit* that the inhabitants of Stratton Street have requested Colonel Rowan to allow two of his Blue Devils to be constantly stationed in front of the Duke of St. Albans’ house in order that the street may be kept clear and not blocked up (as it is at present) by the crowds of persons who loiter there to see the Duchess step into her carriage. At least two hundred of the lowest order were collected on Wednesday morning, attracted by the not very unusual spectacle of three of the St. Albans’ carriages prepared to convey their Graces and suite from the *rus in urbe* of London in the autumn to the *urbs in rure* of Brighton in the winter.” Who Colonel Rowan was does not matter, but his “Blue Devils” were of course Sir Robert Peel’s new police force, which sprang into existence in 1829.

## CHAPTER XXIII

The gaieties and fashions of 1830—The death of George IV—Curious items in the sale of the King's wardrobe—Queen Adelaide at Brighton ignores the Duchess—Was there a quarrel with the Duke's family?—Singular prohibitory clause in the Duchess's will respecting the Duke's brothers—Interesting sidelight on the Duchess thrown by Fanny Kemble—*The Satirist's* assertion as to the marriage contract—The cholera scourge of 1832—The influenza epidemic—The Duchess attacked in 1837—Her death.

IT was fairly apparent in 1830 that the star of the Duchess was becoming dim; not that she was less abundant in her profuse expenditure, but its excessively lavish character no longer excited special admiration. The fêtes of the Marquis of Hertford at his Regent's Park villa not only put those of Holly Lodge in the shade, but what was of greater moment from the aristocratic point of view, they had more *ton*. The abdication of Charles X and the unsettled condition of Paris absorbed more attention than the doings of the English aristocracy, and the ominous whispers concerning the health of George IV helped to put purely social matters in the background.

Nevertheless her Grace kept up her round of gaieties. Among other hospitalities she celebrated May Day with a festival, when, the spring foliage not being considered sufficiently attractive, the trees were hung with flowers—quite a typical instance of the artificial taste of the day. Morris-dancing and the Prague Minstrels entertained the company, to say nothing of a troop of female archers who competed for prizes and moved *The Morning Post* to write in something of its old style that “these amazons, the *Venuses of Cleomenes* of our days, were objects of

peculiar attraction, indeed we never saw the Greek face and figure more finely expressed.” There was the usual enthusiasm, and the breakfast of course consisted of “every delicacy, with the rarest wines, together with fruits equally extraordinary for their size and beauty.”

*The Court Journal* was most taken with “the appearance of the falcons and their keepers,” which “did honour to the hereditary office of the Duke of St. Albans, but an attempt at a display of their picturesque art either proved a failure or was misunderstood by the majority of the guests.” This is aggravatingly vague. One would like to have had more information concerning the “picturesque art.” But there is no vagueness about the following: “The cow and syllabub which were made last season the source of so much ungracious comment by the public press, were again brought forward, and we cannot but congratulate her Grace of St. Albans upon her resolute superiority to such attacks and her staunch defiance of such assailants.”

The Duchess was fond of observing anniversaries. Oak Apple Day was made the occasion of another fête, and one of her admirers wrote some suitable verses which were set to music by Bishop. This is not the only instance of the poet’s genius being fired by these joyous functions. Another song was “Spring is begun,” and was “written for a spring fête given by the Duchess of St. Albans at Brighton.”

Though the Duchess maintained the celebration of old-time festivals, many things which marked the old days were passing away. There were signs of a desire for progress, and the vast possibilities of railways were beginning to turn public attention to the importance of facilitating locomotion. A project to relieve the congestion of London was much talked about in 1829 and 1830—the making of a new street from Waterloo Bridge to the British Museum. The great want of a broad thoroughfare from north to south was fully recognised, but nothing was done, and

it is a thousand pities the scheme was allowed to lapse. That it should have been proposed, however, was evidence that matters other than fashions were being discussed. Fashion, so far as dress was concerned, was undergoing radical changes, and we get much illumination on the subject from an article which appeared in *The Court Journal* for February 6, 1830.

A few points stand out as marking revolutions in man's costume—much less subject to change from caprice and the restlessness of rivalry than woman's—the effects of which have not altogether died out in the present day. The writer notes with praise the introduction of white waistcoats of embroidered "cachmire," and, declaring that "nothing can be better than a white waistcoat under a blue coat and a black velvet collar," remarks that "within a year or two have disappeared the last remnants of ancient garb, the knee breeches." The blue coat with white waistcoat of 1830 was certainly an improvement on the fashion of 1828, when, according to the *Post* of May 19, "the beaux wear a green mixed coat with a velvet collar of the same colour."

The critic of *The Court Journal* does not altogether approve of trousers and regrets the "tight pantelets and Hessian boots well wrinkled at the ankles." As for the "soft hat now in universal use for evening wear," while admitting its convenience he condemns its appearance. He laments the vanishing of the great coat of Genoa velvet—"What so comfortable or so handsome!" Its fur successor with sable cuffs and collar from Russia he pronounces only fit for the opera or for the winter. "The cloak or 'wrap rascal'" he is of opinion "is admirable for a carriage, particularly when worn in the Spanish fashion over the mouth, but here they are seldom made sufficiently ample to throw across the shoulders." Lastly he remarks upon the new fashion of wearing watch-chains on the waistcoat (fobs went out with knee breeches) and observes that "canes are quite ade-

quate substitutes for the old rapier." Some of the handles of these canes were highly ornamental; the critic mentions tortoiseshell, enamel, turquoise, mosaics, agates, chrysolites, topazes, and other decorations.

On June 26 came the long-expected event, the death of George IV, and the papers for weeks contained little else but references to the deceased monarch. Perhaps the most significant is the paragraph of August 19, announcing the "Sale of the King's wardrobe at the warehouse of Mr. Baily the King's upholster." "The property," we read, "is immense, and is the perquisites of the Pages of the Baek Stairs, six in number, and we hear realised £15,000. The Earl of Chesterfield gave two hundred guineas for a sable pelisse which has since been valued at six hundred and was a present from the Emperor Alexander. The Marquis of Hertford was among the purchasers. There were many pairs of boots and shoes which were sold at five shillings per pair, one with the other, to a person in the trade. There were numerous pairs of silk stockings. The cambric and silk handkerchiefs produced a guinea each, although the Pages said they were not worth more than seven shillings. The cellar of snuff was bought by Mr. Poulet of Pall Mall for four hundred pounds."

Fortunately for the "Fashionables" the King was considerate enough to die at the end of the London season, so that very few functions had to be cancelled. Towards the end of the year the Duke and Duchess of St. Albans went to their usual winter retreat—Brighton—where in the spring of 1831 William IV and Queen Adelaide passed several weeks at the Pavilion. The *Journal of Mary Frampton* has an illuminating note on this visit. In February 1831, she writes: "The magnificence of the parties given by the King and Queen at the Pavilion at Brighton are spoken of as realising the ideas of the entertainments described in the *Arabian Nights*, the diners consisting daily of about forty persons. The



RUN NEIGHBOURS, RUN STEAL—NS IS QUADRILLING IT—*Political Satire* 1820

THE DUCHESS AND SIR GEORGE WARRENDER.

From a contemporary caricature (see Introduction).



King very temperate. The Queen too, drawing some degree of line as to character in those she invites, has not even sent a card to the Duchess of St. Albans, the famous Mrs. Coutts, formerly an actress, Miss Mellon." In this restriction the Queen was only following the lead of the high ladies of her Court, but it was only for a time. Subsequently the Duke and Duchess received invitations when the King and Queen were at Brighton.

In *The Court Journal* for May 7, 1831, is a paragraph which must have caused some talk at the time. It runs thus: "It is understood that the circle of the Duchess of St. Albans will for the future be deprived of the attraction of his Grace's beautiful sisters, who are henceforth to reside with their married sister, Lady Carton Capel." No doubt the real significance of this intimation was known to the intimate friends of the Duke and Duchess, but to the general public it was a riddle why this apparently unimportant piece of information should be publicly proclaimed.

There can be little doubt, however, that the Duchess had had a quarrel with the Beauclerks, but the full force of the quarrel and of her Grace's serious displeasure was not known until after her death, when the following remarkable clause was found in her will: "That if the said Duke of St. Albans do and shall permit or suffer his uncle Lord Amelius Beauclerk or any of his family or either of his the duke's brothers, Lord Frederiek or Lord Charles Beauclerk, or either of their families to reside with him, or in either of the houses hereinbefore given to him the said duke for his life as aforesaid or in any other house belonging to him the said duke for the time being for the space of one week, either at one time or at several distinct times in any one year, then and in such case the said annuity or yearly sum of ten thousand pounds shall thenceforth cease to determine as if the said duke were actually dead, and then and in such case also the gift and bequest hereby

made to the said duke for his life of the said estate at or near Holly Lodge aforesaid and the said mes-suage and premises in Piccadilly aforesaid and the rooms at the banking house aforesaid and the plate and other articles given to him for his life as aforesaid shall cease and determine as if he were actually dead."

The dead hand had descended with a vengeance, for this is the only mention of the Beauclerk family (other than the Duke) in the terribly lengthy will and testament. The Duchess was a good hater, for not the slightest memento of any kind is left to the Ladies Beauclerk. Yet at one time they must have been in high favour, for they went with her everywhere, and were apparently under her protection. Fanny Kemble in her *Records of my Girlhood* gives us an interesting glimpse of their close association. She writes : "The Duchess of St. Albans was not without shrewd sense and some humour, though entirely without education, and her sallies were not always in the best possible taste. Her box at Covent Garden could be approached more conveniently by crossing the stage than by the entrance from the front of the house, and she sometimes availed herself of this easier exit to reach her carriage with less delay. One night when my father had been acting Charles II the Duchess of St. Albans, crossing her old ground work, the stage, with her two companions, the pretty Ladies Beauclerk, stopped to shake hands with him (he was still in his stage costume, having remained behind the scenes to give some orders), and, presenting him to her young ladies, said : 'There, my dears ; there's your ancestor.' " Fanny adds maliciously : "I suppose in her earlier days she might not have been a bad representative of their 'ancestor.' "

This episode of course happened before 1831. Of a certain day in that year Fanny records : "In the evening went with my mother to a party at old Lady Cork's. We started for our assembly within

a few minutes of Sunday morning. Such rooms—such ovens ! Such boxes full of fine folks and foul air ! in which we stood and sat and looked and listened and talked nonsense and heard it talked, and perspired and smothered and suffocated. On our arrival, as I was going upstairs I was nearly squeezed flat against the wall by her potent grace the Duchess of St. Albans."

Miss Kemble adds concerning the Duchess : " As Miss Mellon she was one of my mother's stage contemporaries ; a kindhearted, good-humoured, buxom, rather coarse actress, with good looks, and good spirits of a somewhat unrefined sort, which were not without their admirers. . . . My mother, who had always remained on friendly though not intimate terms with her old stage mate, went to see her in the early days of her widowhood, when Mrs. Coutts gave her this moderate estimate of her 'money matters' : ' Ah, I assure you, dear Mrs. Charles, the reports of what poor dear Mr. Coutts has left me are very much exaggerated, not I really believe more than a few hundred thousand pounds. To be sure ' (after a dejected pause) ' there's the bank—they say about fifty thousand a year.' . . . She was a good-natured woman and more than once endeavoured to get my father and mother to bring me to her balls and magnificent parties. This, however, they steadily declined, and she without resenting it sent her invitations to my youngest brother alone, to whom she took a great fancy, to whose accepting her civilities no objection was made.' " Whatever may have been the reason, it is pretty clear that the Duchess was not very popular with her own sex.

Despite Queen Adelaide's studied coldness the Duchess asserted her rights and attended the Drawing-rooms of 1831, thereby bringing down upon her the comment of *The Age* that " his Majesty had never visited any of her private parties and consequently the omission of her name in the list of visitors to his private entertainments can create no surprise.

Having been once received at Court an exclusion now would have cancelled the favour shown by his august brother." It may be that the Duchess found some way of retaliation or of showing her anger, if there be any truth or meaning in a remark of *The Satirist* of September 1 on the absence of the Duke of St. Albans from some function of the King's which all the dukes with his exception attended, that "it forms part of the marriage contract, we understand, that the Duke shall accept of no invitation nor pay any visit without the concurrence of his liege lady."

*The Satirist* came into existence in 1831, and at once joined the yelping pack of scoffers. It belonged to a type of journalism lower and more vulgar than that of *The Age*, and depended upon coarse jokes for its humour such as it was. Until the death of the Duchess its "Chit Chat" column was rarely free from some inane quip, depending on a *double entendre* for its point, in which the Duke and Duchess were ridiculed. The subject matter of these quips was mostly pure invention, and the paper itself in all probability was never seen by the persons it tried to pillory. *The Satirist* in truth would hardly be admitted into any decent household. Unlike *The Age*, which, rightly or wrongly, had substance at the bottom of its attacks, *The Satirist* is worthless as an authority. Possibly its statement as to the marriage contract is wholly fictitious; at the same time there is no knowing what a woman of violent temper, mingled with whims and words, may or may not do. So far as the Duke is concerned it is more than probable that he had no will of his own and had to do exactly as he was told.

In 1832 the gaiety of the town was resumed and the London season opened well. The accession of William IV and more especially the presence of a Queen at the head of the Court, had a beneficial effect on the "Fashionables." The endless round of dinner-parties, balls, and fêtes was proceeding merrily when a hideous spectre appeared in the shape

of the cholera, and everybody who could do so fled from the metropolis. The epidemic made fearful havoc in Paris. A scare set in and London dinner-parties were overspread with a gloom which nothing could dissipate. Raikes records how at a dinner at Lord Hertford's the conversation turned chiefly upon the cholera, and "champagne, ices, and fruits were neglected for plain meats, port and sherry, for fear of the dreadful malady." The Duke and Duchess of St. Albans sought safety in Cheltenham, Tunbridge Wells, and Brighton, passing the winter as usual at the last-named watering-place.

The following year had its afflictions when high society suffered in common with the "lower classes." Influenza succeeded to cholera, and though the new epidemic was not nearly so dire in its effects as cholera it was sufficiently alarming. The journals of 1832 chronicle how the whole of the household at Devonshire House was struck down, twenty of the servants at Northumberland House, and ninety-four clerks at the Bank of England. The Italian Opera, Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and the Haymarket Theatres were closed in consequence of the illness of the performers. The year, in fact, was as depressing as it could well be.

Things brightened in 1833; the royal Drawing-rooms were well attended, the Duchess being among the visitants, and on May 19 she gave one of her annual festivals, regarding which *The Age* observed: "We have received several letters about our Duchess's fête at Holly Lodge on Thursday last, but as she has had the good taste not to publish anything about it in the newspapers we shall not intrude upon her private affairs. It was the ostentation not the woman that we disliked." From this it would appear that not only was there less interest taken in the doings of the Duchess—a matter not to be wondered at considering that for nearly twenty years after she left the stage she had been constantly under the public eye and at times was the most talked-

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about woman in London—but that she herself was sobering down.

She was now at Brighton more than ever—she felt that she was no longer one of the leaders in her peculiar sphere in London, but in Brighton her sway was undisputed. The Duke was still ardent in the pursuance of his duties as Hereditary Falconer. It was a poor business, but it was something to be able not only to wear the special costume, but appear in it in Court as he did in 1831. In January 1834 he gave a falconry entertainment at Patcham, when “he and his men dressed in official green” let loose a number of pigeons, which the falcons, having overcome their preference for partridges, “pounced upon.” It is also recorded that on “one or two occasions the pigeons sought shelter among the carriages”; whether the poor things found it we are not told. A few weeks later he gave another exhibition at Brighton when “the trembling victim hovered in sight of the spectators till at length it darted down and took refuge in a lady’s muff.” He and his falconers in “green and gold” also appeared in a *tableau vivant*, an amusement much in favour at this time, and the scene was rapturously encored. The Duke’s last exploit with his falcons was to pit them against herons, which seem to have held their own pretty well. The sight was not a pretty one, but it appears to have been regarded with equanimity by the ladies who were present. The sport was brutal and answered no purpose, and it is a comfort to release both the Duke and his hawks from further notice.

Throughout 1835 and 1836 there are frequent chroniclings of the Duchess’s efforts to maintain her position in the forefront of fashionable life, and to vie with the Marquis of Hertford, Mr. Hope, and Mrs. Wyndham Lewis (afterwards Mrs. Disraeli and the Countess of Beaconsfield), whose breakfasts and parties were beginning to attract notice and whose mansion in Grosvenor Place was described as “the most perfect lady’s house in London.” Among other

functions was a *fête champêtre* at Holly Lodge, at which attended "nearly all persons of rank now in London (May 1835) without any regard to party"; "a grand dinner at Dover to the officers of the reserve company of the 5th regiment"; "a fête at Dover in honour of his Majesty's birthday"; "a ball and supper at Stratton Street"; a fête at Holly Lodge with "Mr. Yates the comedian as director of the rural sports."

In the spring and early summer of 1837, as though some inward monition was warning her and urging her to make the most of her dwindling days, the Duchess plunged deeper than ever into revelry. She commenced a series of festivities with a ball and supper to commemorate St. Valentine's Day. "Nothing," writes the master of superlatives representing *The Court Journal*, "could exceed the beauty of the designs and tasteful decorations emblematical of the occasion. Hearts of every size and colour united by love knots, with garlands of flowers, were suspended in festoons around the spacious apartments, which were lighted up in the most effective and brilliant manner. . . . On Tuesday a second ball was no less brilliant, the device on the occasion being a *snowball*, indicating that her Grace's intentions, which had been frustrated by that inclement element, were now accomplished. This last was followed by another on Monday equal in every respect to either of the former ones." A tolerable round of exertion this for an elderly lady who had not long before been prostrated by influenza, of which there was a severe recurrence during the year.

Mrs. Baron-Wilson, in recording the movements of the Duchess in the early part of 1837, faces us with one of her confused stories, of which we have not been able to obtain the slightest confirmation. She represents that in consequence of a number of anonymous letters received by the Duchess while at Brighton, and annoyances in other directions, she determined to leave the place altogether. There were

troubles arising out of the Duke's craze for falconry, jealousies over her charities, and altogether things became so unpleasant that "on the 1st of March, therefore, the whole establishment left Brighton never to return." We are also told that when it was heard that she had quitted the town for ever there was a meeting "called at the Town Hall, at which a general expression of thanks was voted by a crowded assemblage to the Duchess of St. Albans . . . together with a respectful request . . . that the Duchess would allow any artist she would select to make a whole-length portrait of her to be placed in the hall with those of the King and Queen as one of the benefactors of Brighton." The reply to this was a refusal of the proffered honour. "Her resolution was taken never to re-enter the town," writes her biographer, "and which (*sic*) nothing could change."

We do not assert that this story had no foundation, but it is singular, to say the least, that no reference to it is to be found in the three Brighton papers for 1837. One would think that "a crowded assemblage" in the Town Hall, called together for such an object, would have been deemed worthy of notice; but there is not a line anywhere. *The Brighton Guardian* of March 1 remarks that "The Duke and Duchess of St. Albans left yesterday (February 28) to stay a fortnight in town," and this is all. Nor does the Brighton press of 1836-7 appear to regard the Duchess as a person of the supreme importance which Mrs. Baron-Wilson would have us believe, whatever she may have been in previous years. When she died, four lines were considered enough by *The Brighton Gazette* and *The Brighton Guardian* to devote to her memory. The *Guardian* remarked that "she will be much missed by the poor," but this is but a meagre tribute to one whose portrait four months before "a crowded assemblage" was so anxious to hang in the Town Hall.

But poor Mrs. Baron-Wilson is incorrigible. There



THE DUCHESS OF ST. ALBANS IN 1835.  
From a contemporary print.



are few things she touches which she does not muddle. Her crowning effort is an account extracted "from a magazine published in 1837" of a *fête* given on June 16 "at Holly Lodge, that being the anniversary of her marriage with the Duke." But on June 16, 1837, she was again ill with influenza and a contemplated series of *fêtes* had to be postponed! In 1836 she gave a *fête* on June 1 to celebrate the Restoration of Charles II, and a second on June 25, but no notice was taken of either function by *The Morning Post*, which, we may say in passing, had in the thirties sobered down considerably.

However, blunders or no blunders, and whatever might have been the year and day of the *fête*, we are under an obligation to Mrs. Baron-Wilson for the quotation from the magazine, as we learn from it some of the manners of the "Fashionables." These manners certainly left much to be desired. We are told that "at the sound of a deafening gong the whole five hundred guests darted into the house, tents, and temporary rooms in which the breakfast-dinner was laid, and the scramble for places was something perfectly ludicrous among such high-bred persons long accustomed to similar entertainments. . . . Every luxury was of course in profusion, but it was often to be wished that the champagne had not been so plentiful. It is said that there were a certain set of dowagers of high rank who were proverbial for sitting at more than one of the tables. Thinking that no one's attention was called they have been seen to take two repasts in different rooms, departing with a look of enquiry towards a quiet tent, perhaps hoping for a third."

Here, at least, was a subject for the pen of the satirists, but *The Age* had nothing to say about these fashionable old lady gorgers. Of course the entertainment was not complete without the cow, the Swiss singers, and the syllabub, the falconry, the illuminations, and the dancing, while, as a fitting conclusion, we are told that "the expense is some-

thing too enormous even to guess at ; but we know a bachelor party who wished to return civilities of a somewhat similar rural fête and the estimate exceeded £2,000."

This fête was, so to speak, the Duchess's " swan song." Shortly after, while at Stratton Street, she was seized with a low nervous fever, and for a change she removed to Holly Lodge, where, reported *The Court Journal*, " she is for the present domiciled. . . . The Duchess intends when her health is perfectly restored to open to the gay world her mansion in Stratton Street and to resume her rural annual fête at Holly Lodge." Despite her illness she had her mind fixed on the one thing she lived for—the entertainment of the " gay world." But the end was approaching, and instead of paragraphs heralding the approach of the " rural fête " came the announcement that the fête had been deferred and that the Duchess was so weak she had to be assisted in and out of her carriage. She was driven round the grounds in her pony chair whenever she could stand the fatigue, but she became weaker every day, her mind wandered, and she could take no nourishment.

A phrase in a notice which appeared in one of the newspapers after her death speaks volumes : " she could not bear the stillness." The sudden cessation of the constant excitement which had sustained her vitality, the consciousness that the pleasure of her existence in the display of her riches, whether in hospitality or charity, was over, must have told severely upon her. Little wonder that her thoughts went back to the old man to whom she owed everything—Thomas Coutts. To quote again from the same notice, she " requested to be removed to Piccadilly. There on the ground floor in the great dining-room she lay for two months, quite tranquil and without pain, and then desired to be carried into the room where Mr. Coutts died. There her Grace also expired."

Then came the funeral, with the usual pomp and ceremony, the journey to Redbourne, and the various

haltings for the night at roadside inns; the last offices in the church, and the multitude of obituary notices. There were many subjects for speculation, among them her exact age, her riches, her will. Concerning the first the inscription on the coffin gave no information. It mentioned only her name, her rank, and the date of her death, August 6, 1837. According to *The Gentleman's Magazine* she spoke of her birth as happening in 1778; Mrs. Baron-Wilson puts it at 1777, and *The Gentleman's Magazine* speaks of some authorities as mentioning 1771. Sylvanus Urban is inclined to fix the date at 1774-1775, midway between the two extremes. If this be true her age would be sixty-three, but the probability is that she was older. She was very sensitive on the point, and accuracy does not go for much when this is the case.

We are not concerned about the precise amount of the fortune the Duchess left. It was doubtless very large—much larger than that which was bequeathed to her by Mr. Coutts, for enormous though her annual expenditure was, it never reached by £40,000 (*The Gentleman's Magazine* is our authority for this) the total of her income, and the accumulated surplus increased the original amount threefold. As for her will, those who are interested in its various dispositions will find them set forth by Mrs. Baron-Wilson, who gives the portentous document in its entirety. It will be sufficient to repeat what most people already know, that she left the bulk of her vast wealth to the late Baroness Angela Burdett-Coutts, the daughter of Sir Francis Burdett and the granddaughter of Thomas Coutts. It is unnecessary to say how unostentatiously the Baroness devoted a large portion of her riches to objects not only of benevolence but of practical utility, and if in many cases the results were not what she anticipated—the building of Columbia Market for instance—it only furnishes an additional proof how difficult it is to do good in this world by the mere giving of money.

One would like to have pictured Harriot Mellon

more intimately than has been possible with the scanty and often misleading material to hand. The little personal characteristics noted by Moneckton-Milnes, by J. T. Smith, and by Fanny Kemble stimulate curiosity, but that curiosity cannot be gratified. As the Duchess appears from her doings publicly recorded, she devoted her wealth to the gratification of her vanity. She hungered for the admiration of the rich and especially of the nobly born, and she thirsted for the gratitude of those on whom she bestowed her "benevolence." She probably was not ostentatious—we are inclined to think that she was genuinely anxious to see happiness around her, and, it must be owned, also, to feel that she was the cause of that happiness—but she could not avoid the accusation. It would be pleasant if one could connect her name with some lasting act of charity free from the momentary gratification of self-love. The gold she flung away under the impression that she was benefiting the recipients did more harm than good. It simply fostered laziness, hypocrisy, fraud, and begging. She must not, however, be judged harshly on this account. It was the fashion of the times, and the times must always be remembered in estimating Harriot Mellon—Mrs. Coutts—the Duchess of St. Albans.

## APPENDIX

WHEN the Duchess was dead *The Age* offered an explanation—it cannot be called an apology—for its persistent attacks upon her, and in the issue after her death appeared this paragraph: “During her life, and particularly since her marriage to the Duke of St. Albans, we have occasionally indulged in some harmless pleasantries upon her vagaries, more with a view to correct her ridiculous exhibitions of pride and folly, than with any desire to annoy the feelings of the woman; in proof of which we refer to our columns. When she ceased to advertise her ostentatious almsgiving and theatrical mummeries at Holly Grove and elsewhere, we ceased to notice her.”

The next two numbers (August 13 and 20) contained a biographical notice written by Westmacott as follows:

“To the editor of this journal she was personally well known in earlier life when an actress at York Theatre, and from that period to the present time it has occurred to him from peculiar circumstances to know more of her *true history* than to any other person now in existence.

“Harriett Mellon or Malone (the latter being her real name) was born at Kendal in the county of Westmoreland about the year 1770. Her mother was a servant of all work who travelled with the family of the Bibbys, an itinerant company, who for many years exhibited in the towns on the verge of Lancashire, and Yorkshire, and Westmoreland. Her father and mother were both Irish; the latter (? former) is said to have been a person at one time of some consequence as a commercial man in Dublin, who, becoming charged with treasonable and seditious offences, fled from Ireland and, being a man of lively talent and attractive person, sought a refuge from poverty in the profession of a strolling actor—his real name was John Kinnear, and if old Mr. Bibby’s information was correct, in whose company he acted, his death took place during the infancy of his illegitimate daughter.

“ The mother continued in the same menial office until Harriett attained her thirteenth year, when, being a very attractive girl and a useful actress for all the juvenile parts in comedy, tragedy, farce, and pantomime, and above all an admirable breeches figure, she was first removed to Stanton’s company, where she was discovered by old Tate Wilkinson, the then manager of the York company . . . who transferred the promising Miss Harriett Malone to the York company, altering her patronymic to the more Anglicised cognomen of Mellon. . . . From York she was engaged by Lewis, Banks and Knight, the managers of the Theatre Royal, Liverpool, to lead the comedy business, where she greatly increased both her fame and finances at the same time. Miss Mellon, a luxuriant-looking woman of brilliant talent, great archness of manner, black eyes, and raven hair, was at this period the belle of the provinces, and during the Liverpool vacation she starred at many of the neighbouring towns with very flattering success. Up to this period her conduct was unimpeachable—she had, it is said, withstood the most tempting offers, and she was consequently well received in some of the best families, amongst others in that of the Hortons of Stafford, wholesale shoemakers of large property and great influence, who were particularly interested in her favour.”

Westamacott confirms the current story of her introduction to Sheridan, and to Drury Lane “ at a period when the green room of Drury Lane was frequented by the *élite* of the land from the accomplished Prince of Wales to the highly polished Colonel Mellish, from Beau Brummell to the wits Jeykill, Tickell, and Sheridan. With all Miss Mellon was an object of admiration, but to all she was inaccessible. Ralph Wewitzer was her sole mentor and adviser, and there is no doubt that he it was who advised and arranged the terms upon which she surrendered to old Coutts, who was at that time a constant attendant behind the scenes of the theatre. The rich banker had for a long period previous to his intimacy with Miss Mellon lived with, or rather provided a splendid establishment for, Mrs. Martyr, the singer, who resided in Long Aere in the magnificent apartments over Hatchetts, the King’s coachmakers ; but Mr. Coutts, calling there one evening unexpectedly, was informed by a strange servant that he could not go upstairs as her *master* and mistress were at home. ‘ And who is your master ? ’ enquired the old banker. ‘ Mr. Parkes,’ said the innocent

servant. The banker retired, and upon enquiry found that Parkes ( ? Parke), the celebrated oboe-player, rather more than shared the favour of the lady with him, consequently he broke off the intimacy, paid the lady's debts, and left his rival in quiet possession of the false fair one.

“ At this period Miss Mellon occupied very mean apartments at a hairdresser's in Great ( ? Little) Russell Street, opposite Drury Lane Theatre, and adjoining what is now the Albion Tavern. Here she first blazed forth upon the town by starting a very splendid equipage, a barouche and four horses, and accompanied by her then friend, Miss Sarah Stevenson, daughter of a cheesemonger and box-book-keeper at the English Opera, she astonished the cockneys, who could not understand how she had acquired this very sudden increase of fortune. To silence curiosity and to deceive the fashionable paragraph writers of the slipshod *Post*, her friend Hewitzer invented the tale of the prize in the lottery which was for a time believed. . . . The fact was, and we are here quoting the authority of poor Hewitzer, that Coutts gave her as a consideration seven cheques, the amounts being blank, with liberty to fill them up for a sum not exceeding one hundred thousand pounds. This was the prize in the lottery—of life, it should have been added. From Russell Street, as the affair became notorious, the lady removed to a spacious mansion in Southampton Street, where she assumed a less equivocal position and became publicly known as the mistress of old Coutts the banker.

“ In Southampton Street, Harriett Mellon threw off all disguise ; her venerable inamorato visited her openly. Her equipage was in the most dashing style and her establishment was fitted up with splendid taste. Poor Hewitzer, to whom she was principally indebted for her fortunate introduction to the banker, was suddenly and capriciously dismissed her presence. . . . She allowed him to linger in misery and die in the greatest distress, although appealed to in the most feeling manner by those who administered to his necessities. The notoriety consequent upon her connexion with old Coutts soon blazed forth in fashionable paragraphs and led to an explanation between the banker, his wife, and daughters, all three of whom were then married to Lord Guilford, Lord Bute, and Sir F. Burdett.

“ We shall not here dilate upon a scene which for duplicity and dramatic effect is perhaps unequalled in the romance of private life ; suffice it to say that old Coutts

imposed his *chère amie* upon his amiable wife and daughters as his illegitimate offspring born before his knowledge of the mother, and in this character she was kindly received by the first Mrs. Coutts, who up to the period of her death believed her to be so. On the morning following his wife's death old Coutts was privately married to her; Raymond giving her away, the gracious lady presented him with a check for £1,000 for his affectionate attentions. There was, however, some great informality in this proceeding, and the clergyman who officiated was upon enquiry removed by his diocesan, the banker allowing him afterwards a paltry stipend hardly enough to exist upon. They were afterwards re-married, we believe, at Highgate ( ? St. Paneras) Church and the lady was legally installed mistress of the mansion in Stratton Street, Piccadilly.

“ We purposely omit to notice here the very serious quarrel which took place with Sir Francis Burdett and the family, and which led to the Hon. Baronet changing his residence. On the death of Raymond the actor, whose real name was Grant, she gave him a splendid funeral and stood at the window in Piccadilly to see it pass from his house in Chester Street, Grosvenor Place. Her former intimate female friend having made a slip with another manager, she expelled the lady her house and treated the gentleman most ignominiously when he paid his next visit. . . . One of the more striking and appalling instances of her ingratitude occurred to poor Dr. Andrews, a handsome, gentlemanly man, who lived in Frith Street and had a very respectable practice—this he was induced upon her persuasion to abandon to reside with her and Mr. Coutts in the house in Stratton Street. The doctor had obtained her permission to visit some friends at Tunbridge Wells, but staying only one day longer than his furlough he found the door closed against him on his return. His prospects in life blasted for him, he retired to the home of a private friend, opened the femoral artery and bled to death.

“ From this period until the death of Mr. Coutts, which took place in 1822, she fooled the old dotard to his heart's content and eventually succeeded to the whole of his immense property—his daughters, relations, clerks and servants being left expectants upon her bounty.

“ Harriett Mellon, Mrs. Coutts, was now a millionaire—she was the richest woman in England, free and unembarrassed to do as she pleased ; but her ambition was not satisfied

—she determined to be a Duchess, nothing less would gratify her vanity. Poor peers she could have had her choice of, but Dukes were rather scarce. Devonshire was deaf to her entreaties, he *could not* or would not marry—besides *he* did not want money. Dorset was a beau of great taste, but then he was an admirer of *juvenile* beauty. The notorious Marchioness of Lansdowne, the widow of Castle Jordan, was her confidant and adviser—between them they had a scheme to entrap an illustrious Duke whose necessities had placed him under some obligations to the lady and her partners.

“ This good-tempered, kind-hearted man had become a visitor to Stratton Street during the life of Mr. Coutts and continued so for some time after his decease, but when the old intriguing Marchioness broached the subject of marriage and set forth the great wealth and accomplishments of the lady, he very coolly took his hat and made his last bow, leaving Widow Coutts to cry ‘ York, you’re wanted.’ Her long negotiations, her trial tours, her ultimate purchase and admirable management of that living nonentity the disconsolate Duke of St. Albans, will afford materials for another chapter; suffice it that for the present she used to say that ‘ he was a bad bargain—she bought him too dear, it cost her so much trouble to keep him in order, and as for his dual honours he derived them from a source no higher or better than herself.’ ”

Westmacott told his readers that “ these Memoirs will appear in a more extended form,” but so far as we have been able to discover he never carried out his intention, nor did *The Age* after August 20, 1837, contain another allusion to the Duchess. The “ biography ” was evidently hurriedly written and there are several slips which we have indicated. Those slips are not of sufficient importance to invalidate the main facts—if they *are* facts, a question on which, where all is obscure, we offer no opinion. The expression “ York, you’re wanted,” refers to the rumour of an alliance with the Duke of York. The author of the biography in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* puts it that an offer of marriage was made by the Duke; if so Mrs. Coutts was well advised in refusing it. As a “ morganatic wife,” she would have been relegated to the background and she would never have been received at Court.

As to the story of Harriot Mellon’s introduction to the first Mrs. Coutts and her daughters, Mrs. Baron-Wilson’s version of the matter is: “ From her steady demeanour she was

generally considered by her friends to be *an unacknowledged daughter of Mr. Coutts*; and from the friendship shown to her by his daughters they had possibly formed a similar conclusion." The italics are Mrs. Baron-Wilson's, and we may presume that she had her reasons for emphasising the words so particularised. Rightly or wrongly it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the passage above quoted in a measure corroborates Westmacott's account of what he calls Mr. Coutts's "duplicity."

It is noteworthy that Mrs. Baron-Wilson has hardly anything to say about Harriot's residing in Southampton Street. In one place she talks at random of "one of her bedrooms in Henrietta Street," but without any explanation how Harriot came to be there, and whether "Henrietta Street" is intended for "Southampton Street" it is hard to decide. In any case she is extremely vague concerning the long period between 1807, when Mrs. Martyr died, and 1815, the year of the Coutts-Mellon marriage. But these and many other matters on which there is no precise information must be left as they are. Elucidation is impossible.

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